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HUMOR IN THE RUSSIAN COMEDY FROM CATHERINE TO GOGOL

BY
ARTHUR P. COLEMAN

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY, IN THE
FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

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COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY SLAVONIC STUDIES

VOL. II

HUMOR IN THE RUSSIAN COMEDY
FROM CATHERINE TO GOGOL

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
NEW YORK

SALES AGENTS

HUMPHREY MILFORD

AMEN CORNER, E.C.

LONDON

EDWARD EVANS & SONS, LTD.

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Printed from type. Published May, 1925

THE PLIMPTON PRESS
NORWOOD MASS·U·S·A

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PREFATORY NOTE

FOR help in gathering material for this study my thanks are due the staffs of the libraries of Yale University, of Columbia University, of the University of Prague, and of the New York Public Library.

My sincere gratitude is also extended to my first teacher of Russian, Mr. Max S. Mandell of Yale University, and to Professor Clarence A. Manning of the Department of Slavonic Languages of Columbia University.

Finally, I express my thanks to my wife for much aid and counsel.

CHESHIRE, CONN.

March 11, 1925.

THE HUMOR IN THE RUSSIAN COMEDY

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The object of this study is to explore with some degree of completeness the subject of Russian humor in the drama of that period which may be regarded as the formative one of Russian literature. Instead of employing western critical standards in the process of determining just which comedies are the most important, it seemed wiser to make use of the great body of intelligent Russian opinion. For, although to the Anglo-Saxon intellect *The Miller, Sorcerer, Deceiver, and Matchmaker* (1779), of Ablesimov may seem to be a clever piece of work, the fact that its success was only temporary proves that it was not a good exposition of the Russian comic spirit in its more permanent aspects. In like manner, even though to the American critic the *Calumny* (Yabeda) of Kapnist may seem to present the comic side of bribe-taking in a manner at least comparable to *The Revizor* of Gogol, its influence has been so slight that it cannot possibly be said to have interpreted Russian humor to any marked degree. It is merely a side current in the main stream of literary evolution.

One of the most important of these side currents sought to bring about the improvement of Russian drama by a meticulous imitation of the French authors who followed the tradition of Molière. In this movement the most conspicuous position was held by Sumarokov (1718-1777), the veteran writer of comedies for and later a director of the first permanent Russian theatre. He borrowed from the French, notably from Destouches, his subjects and his types which he then tried to dress in Russian clothes. For example, in his comedy *The Tutor*, the main character is a

hypocrite and a rogue taken over from the Tartuffe of Molière.

But amid all this servile imitation of France genuine efforts were occasionally made to introduce real Russian elements. Of such a nature were the attempts of Lukin (1737-1794). To this end he worked over a number of French comedies in the effort to "incline them to Russian customs". His best drama is *The Spendthrift Set Right by Love*, which deals with the adventures of a young man, Dobroserdov (Mr. Goodheart) in Moscow, where, getting in bad company, he was nearly ruined by his creditors and false friends. In the end he has a large legacy and marries the girl. Although in this play some genuine national elements are introduced, Lukin, however, left no great name for himself on account of his small measure of talent. His efforts, though in the right direction, were of small significance.

To this period belong also D. I. Kvastov (1757-1835) and N. P. Nikolev (1758-1815). The latter was ardently patriotic in his work. He wrote among other things *The Egoistic Versifier*.

Although at an earlier date Sokolov and others had satirized the miscarriage of justice, Kapnist (1737-1824), in the afore-mentioned *Calumny*, was the most prominent representative of this school.

Sentimentalism imported from the west in the latter part of the eighteenth century is represented by M. I. Verevkin (1732-1795); and by A. O. Ablesimov (1742-1793), whose best comedy was, as we have said, *The Miller, Sorcerer, Deceiver, and Matchmaker*. This same sentimental tendency was carried on by the now forgotten Prokudin, Ephimiev, Naryshkin, and Babichev.

The reaction against sentimentalism, very weak at this time, was led by Yakov Knyazhnin (1742-1791).

Later, in the beginning of the nineteenth century, the tendency was to satire and vaudeville in the light manner. In this direction A. A. Shakovsky (1777-1846) was a tireless worker. He had real talent for the comic and, more than that, he labored hard for the larger aims of the Russian

theatre. To this same group belong: T. V. Postopchin (1763-1826), T. Kokoshkin, M. N. Zagoskin (1789-1852), and N. I. Khmelnitzky (1789-1845).

But although the efforts of all these minor writers of comedy laid the foundation of and prepared the setting for the works of their more brilliant contemporaries, they are not of sufficient importance to claim the attention of a general study.

Having then limited our consideration to the humor which has been produced by the foremost writers of comedy within the dates named in the title, and having discarded those efforts which the judgment of later Russians has declined to support, we are confronted with the work of three men, Denis Ivanovich Fonvizin¹ (1745-1792), Alexander Sergeyevich Griboyedow (1795-1829), and Nikolay Vasilyevich Gogol (1809-1852).

Although the comedies of the Empress Catherine (reigned 1762-1796) do not deserve to be included in the category of immortals, either for their intrinsic merit or because they are read or acted extensively at the present time, they will be given some attention for another reason. Catherine's guiding influence, felt in every sphere of life in the latter part of the eighteenth century, was of supreme importance in the field of letters as an inspiration to others. Although Catherine was by birth a German princess, yet through her more than anyone else passed those currents of western thought which were the glory of the Russia of that day. Catherine was in constant communication with Diderot, Voltaire, and many others of that group of teachers and writers who were just then busily engaged in making over the ideals of their time. The imperial court, then, was a clearing house for all the thousand different impressions

¹ Fonvizin's name came from an old Livonian knightly family, a member of which was taken captive by the Russians in the reign of Ivan the Terrible. The name was originally spelled Von Vizin. Under the influence of the Russian it became Fon-Vizin by the time of Denis Ivanovich. After his death, about the middle of the nineteenth century, the family dropped the hyphen in an effort to make the name completely Russian in appearance. The result is the now universally accepted spelling of Fonvizin.

from the west which Russia was trying to understand and assimilate. It was there that the foundations were laid on which was built the great literature of the nineteenth century.

But it is not with these greater achievements of Catherine that we are concerned. It is rather with her more modest efforts in the form of comedy that we have to deal. In extent her labors in this line were considerable, for she wrote fourteen comedies, of which eleven are now extant. This is all the more remarkable when we reflect on the extent of her labors in foreign affairs. Although in general she took Peter the Great as her model, she could not help giving a feminine touch to the rather uncouth court that she found on her accession. Feeling that she must have some diversion from the fierce matters of state, she wrote comedies. Probably she had no consistent desire to reform humanity in a thoroughgoing manner by these clever satirical comedies; nor did she plan to uncover the evils of her day to such an extent that a change of dynasty might be thought advisable! Her comedies, therefore, lacked that fearlessness and defiance of convention which are the ground-work of great, epoch-making creations. They have, at any rate, never attained to a high place in Russian literature. It is a fact, moreover, that they became discredited in the eyes of their critics of the nineteenth century, more, possibly, because they were written by a ruler than because of their crudity and formlessness. For these critics were all of more or less pronounced liberal tendencies. Then too the whole trend of the literature of the next hundred years was toward a more searching analysis of character and motive than was possible in such simple pieces as the Empress wrote. Perhaps Kotlyarevsky has best explained the attitude of Russian critical opinion when he states: "If we take in its entirety our whole comedy of the eighteenth century, we are surprised in spite of ourselves by its small artistic value. . . . As harmless mirth seem, for example, the comedies of the Empress herself with their accusing frankness, of which her faithful subjects were so proud, agitated by all the tiny popular vices and lulled to sleep

by all the large vices.”² Such a statement, though perfectly true, does not alter the fact that from the point of view of humor Catherine has done some work which should have a place in any study of this portion of the Russian comedy.

Since the comedies of Catherine are hardly known at all among English-speaking peoples it will be desirable, in order that many of the later observations may be intelligible, to give a short résumé of both her more important comedies: *O Time* and *The Name-day of Madame Vorchalkina* (Mrs. Grumbler). Both these comedies date approximately from the year 1772.

As is apparent from the prefatory note, *O Time*, “a comedy in three acts, composed in Yaroslav at the time of the plague in 1772,” requires seven actors and actresses and has its setting in Moscow in the house of Madam Khanzhakhina. It contains no rules for the costuming, nor extensive stage directions. There are no songs or dances. It observes the unities strictly. Prose is employed throughout. Because of its extreme shortness it offers a parallel to a modern one-act comedy.

Madam Khanzhakhina (Mrs. Hypocrite), a hard, grasping, old formalist, so busy with her prayers that she has no time to be human to her servants or civil to those who have business with her, has so much to say to her two old cronies that Nepustov finds it impossible to wring any definite answer from her in regard to the marriage of her granddaughter Khristina to Molokososov (Mr. Milksop). This young girl, not over-bright and with a boundless unsophistication, decides after repeated prodding by her maid, that she might like to marry the afore-mentioned Molokososov. But Khanzhakhina, after a chat with those two old gossips, Madam Vvestnikova (Mrs. Talebearer) and Madam Chudikhina (Mrs. Marvel), refuses for the most petty reasons to give her consent. At this the clever maid sets her ingenuity to work. Knowing that Madam Vvestnikova has great influence with Madam Khanzhakhina, she advises Molokososov to give her a valuable ring. After re-

² Kotlyarevsky, *Gogol*, p. 253.

ceiving this gift, the old lady promises to help promote the match; the other neighbor, Madam Chudikhina, continues to oppose. At this Mavra, the maid, tells the latter that thirty years ago a man had died on the very spot where she happened to be sitting. The poor soul dashes from the room in mortal terror. Madam Vvestnikova artfully uses the opportunity to tell her that God has punished her in this manner for her opposition to the marriage. The consent of Madam Khanzhakhina is soon forthcoming. The last scene is a sermon by Mavra.

The Name-day of Madam Vorchalkina, nearly twice as long as *O Time*, is not so well done. It employs thirteen characters and is divided into five acts. Just where the scene is laid is not stated. There are no suggestions concerning proper costuming of the actors, neither are there intercalated any songs or dances. French classical influence is apparent in the general structure of the play.

At the beginning of the piece *Olimpiada*, the elder daughter of Madam Vorchalkina, receives a warning from her maid that it is high time she set about looking for a husband. The girl demurs. A little later the sage of the play, Dremov (Mr. Slumber), asks the hand of the younger daughter, Khristina, for his nephew Talarikin. Madam Vorchalkina, however, insists on standing by what she calls the good old tradition of marrying the older daughter first. In the meantime, two other suitors for the girls have hit upon an expedient for hurrying up the mother. They cause it to be stated in the presence of the latter that the government will soon promulgate an edict to the effect that no marriages can be solemnized for a period of ten years. Becoming frantic at the prospect of being unable to marry off her daughters for such a long time, the mother tells her daughters that they must at once marry these two deceiving suitors. Khristina becomes ill and falls in a faint, for she really loves Talarikin. The maze of difficulties is finally unravelled. The older sister yields her right to a prior marriage and allows the younger to have Talarikin. The false suitors are driven from the house together with Firlyuf-yushkov, a giddy-headed dandy. The drama ends as all

good comedies should end, with a wedding. While the guests are celebrating in another part of the house Paras-kovya, the maid, moralizes in a way characteristic of the eighteenth century.

Denis Ivanovich Fonvizin agreed with his empress that the main business of a comedy was to amuse and not to become too deeply involved in reform movements. Whether he did this from conviction as an upholder of the monarchy would have one believe, or from necessity, as the champions of civil liberty have endeavored to prove, is a debatable question. At all events, he was careful to be not too caustic in his puns, for the government did not always follow what it was fond of preaching in regard to free speech and press. Yet there was one line of progress in which he certainly took a great interest, the movement for the betterment of the educational system. Catherine herself was busily engaged in founding schools of all kinds, and in this work she was only continuing the work of her immediate predecessors, notably that of Peter the Great. At first the great mass of the Russian people were stubbornly opposed³ to the new education, weighed down as they were by a cultural inertia that stretched back half a millenium to the time when the budding culture of the Russians was prevented from fruition by the blighting incursions of the Tatar hordes. But as the eighteenth century passed along, more and more adherents to the new cause were gained, so that Catherine did not face quite so determined an opposition as had confronted Peter. The best minds were on her side; and among those gifted promoters of education who surrounded the empress, not the least important was Fonvizin.

Fonvizin derives his chief claim to remembrance from two comedies, the first of which was written, according to the critics, sometime from 1764 to 1768.⁴ This play, *The Brigadier*, is a comedy or five acts, some forty-five pages in length, employing only eight characters in all. The

³ See Porfiriv, *Istoriva Russkov Slovesnosti*, vol. 2, p. 76.

⁴ For a discussion of the evidence supporting the various dates, see Pokrovsky, *Denis Ivanovich Fonvizin*.

scene is laid in the country. As would be supposed in a piece which goes back to French sources the three unities are quite carefully observed. Prose is employed throughout, for the author was not gifted in the art of poetry. There is only one small note in regard to the costumes of the actors, and this is placed at the very beginning. No songs or dances are included. There are no long soliloquies.

Act I of *The Brigadier* opens with a prolonged scene in which the principal characters reveal their more striking qualities. The brigadier himself is a typical old Russian soldier, rough, rather coarse with his wife, fond of boasting, and immensely proud of the fact that he is, as he thinks, Russian to the core. His wife is a hard, grasping old materialist who, according to her son, would go through an attack of spotted fever for a ruble. The councillor affords an example of a corrupt official, for he straightway decided that it was time for him to go into retirement when an edict against extortion went forth from the central authority. Ivanushka, son of the brigadier, is a shallow youth of twenty-five who enjoyed a fashionable ennui when he was not imitating some French custom or other. Vapid franco-ophile that he was, he delighted to make love to the councillor's wife, as he had seen it done during his short stay in Paris. The latter lady, being greatly flattered by his attentions, is chiefly of use in providing a companion for Ivanushka. Sofia, the unwilling fiancée of the latter, has a rather colorless lover, Dobrolyubov (Mr. Lovegood). At the end of the act this pair are plotting as to the best means of getting rid of Ivanushka and of themselves marrying.

Acts II and III display two more or less mutually returned affections between the councillor and the wife of the brigadier and conversely between the brigadier and the wife of the councillor. It develops also that Dobrolyubov has had a sudden change of fortune which has left him in possession of the very substantial estate represented by two thousand serfs. This causes an entire change of front on the part of the councillor, who is now quite willing to have his daughter marry such a well-to-do young man.

The fourth act adds practically nothing to the plot.

Clearly it is merely stuffing, although there are of course some jokes and an occasional clever remark. In the fifth act the action proceeds rapidly. Ivanushka is discovered in the act of declaring his love to the councillor's wife in the most stilted French fashion. This gives Sofia an excuse for refusing to marry him. Thereupon Ivanushka begins to play his cards in dead earnest. First he reminds the councillor of that gentleman's own lovemaking with his (Ivanushka's) mother. Then after that old hypocrite has been forced to recant, it is publicly announced that the brigadier also has been guilty of making advances to another man's wife. Confronted by this just accusation the old soldier calls his carriage and orders his wife and son to leave the councillor's house where he has suffered such disgrace. In the last scene the councillor and his wife give their consent to the union of Dobrolyubov and Sofia. Then the councillor, pretending at least to be repentant for his many sins, turns to the audience and says:

They say that it is bad to live with one's conscience, but I have myself just now learned that to live without one's conscience is of all things the worst.

In the second comedy of Fonvizin, usually translated into English as *The Minor*, although a more accurate rendering would be *The Unlicked Cub* (the Russian is Nedorosl'), the idea in the background is the need of education in Russia. It is slightly longer than *The Brigadier*. The scene is laid in the country, and some fifteen actors are required to produce it. The plot is better organized and more unified throughout all of its five acts. Like *The Brigadier* — it is written in prose in conformity with the rules of the classic French school. There are no songs or dances intercalated. Neither are there notes on the proper costuming of the actors. One important feature which gives an operatic touch to the piece is the fact that several characters sometimes answer at once, not all in the same words, as in a real operatic chorus, but all saying entirely different things. The result is usually not a clever dramatic effect but a confused babble. The action, rapid enough in spots, is interrupted by the long soliloquies of Starodum (Mr.

Old-thinker), the tedious moralizing of Pravdin (Mr. Just-one), or the ethereal sentimentality of the hero, Milon.

Madam Prostakov (Mrs. Simpleton), an ignorant, grasping woman, shares with her husband, who is afraid to say his life is his own, a wardship over an orphan named Sofia. This girl, who possesses a moderate inheritance out in the country, an inheritance consisting chiefly of swine, is sought in marriage by Taras Skotinin, a country dullard and the brother of Madam Prostakov. Just as it looks as if he would be successful in his suit Sofia rushes in with a letter from her uncle who, so far from being dead, has made 10,000 rubles in Siberia. At once the old lady decides that the girl is too good for her brother and that she would make a fine bride for her son, Mitrofan, a half-grown youngster with atrociously vulgar manners. Skotinin does not take kindly to the change, but continues to prosecute his suit with distressing uncouthness. Sofia's uncle, Starodum, who represents the best of the old tradition of integrity, comes from Moscow to help his niece to escape from the clutches of Madam Prostakov. In the meantime an official of the government with authority to correct abuse of power in the empire, Pravdin by name, has been investigating the mismanagement of the estate. Quickly sizing up the situation, Starodum betroths his niece to a young officer who possesses all the moral virtues imaginable, besides being the ardent choice of the girl herself. The vices of the Prostakovs become more and more apparent, especially during a very amusing examination of Mitrofan on the rudiments of knowledge. Later it develops that one of Mitrofan's supposedly learned tutors had previously been a coachman of Starodum. Finally Pravdin confiscates the estate in the name of the government. Everything is taken from the Prostakovs. Even Mitrofan, for whom in her misguided way Madam Prostakov certainly has great affection, decides to leave his mother and enter the civil or military service. With a pedantic flourish so common in the Russian literature of this period, Starodum, pointing to Madam Prostakov, proclaims to all:

Here you behold the worthy deserts of unrighteousness.

The masterpiece of Alexander Sergyeevich Griboyedov,⁵ *Gore ot Uma* in the Russian, is called in English either *Intelligence Comes to Grief* or *The Misfortune of Being Clever*. Unlike the work of Catherine and Fonvizin, his great comedy has been translated into English and is an interesting representation of the society of Moscow during the reign of Alexander I from a different angle than that in the *War and Peace* of Tolstoy.⁶ Completed about the year 1823, it was put upon the stage only in 1831 and printed in 1833, such was the number and force of the opponents who were stirred up by its fearless exposure of the truth. It is a powerful four-act comedy of manners. The scene is laid in Moscow in the house of Famusov about the year 1822. The play fills more than a hundred pages with a succession of cleverly rhymed verses of different varieties and requires twenty named actors besides a bevy of guests and servants. As has been pointed out it is written in conformity with the rules of the classical school, although some liberties are taken with the unities, especially those of place and of action. No songs nor dances are suggested. A plausible and interesting plot is made the ostensible reason for a studied delineation and evaluation of society. The action runs as follows:

Sofia, the daughter of a prosperous official, Famusov, has been entertaining the latter's secretary Molchalin (Mr. Silent) in her room the whole of the night. Finally at break of day Famusov endeavors to enter his daughter's room to find out the true state of affairs but is prevented from doing so by the clever maneuvering of the maid Liza. Later in the same day an old lover of Sofia returns from a three-year trip abroad. Chatzky, for that is his name, has grown to be too deep for the shallow girl whose mind is nourished by French sentimental romances. He seems to her to be not a human being but a serpent. The act ends with the dramatic words of Famusov:

What a commission it is, O Creator, to be the father of a grown-up daughter.

⁵ For an excellent appreciation, see: A. S. Griboyedov, *Gore ot Uma*, red. E. A. Lyatzkago, Stockholm, 1920, pp. 3-64.

⁶ See A. Kirpichnikov, *Gore ot Uma i Voyna i Mir*, pp. 341-383.

In the second act Chatzky calls on Famusov and tells some of the faults of Moscow. This denunciation of the old order causes the official to work himself up to a white heat in condemnation of the younger generation. Chatzky on his side is equally warm, and the temperature is cooled only by the laughable misfortune of Molchalin, who has fallen from his horse amid cries and wails out of all proportion to the slightness of his injury. Sofia treats him with his scratched arm as if he were a mangled knight. In gratitude for her solicitude the "knight," as soon as her back is turned, proceeds to make love to the maid Liza. This prepares the way for another of those masterly curtains with which each act ends. In this case Liza is left on the stage, a forlorn figure, the puppet of fate, in a wilderness of conflicting emotions.

In Act III Chatzky is again rebuffed by Sofia. With Molchalin he exchanges enlightening views on life, neither comprehending the other's position. A whole pantomime of the society of Moscow is presented when the guests arrive for the evening ball. In a spirit of malice Sofia sets in motion a fiction that Chatzky is mad. The act ends with Chatzky, against a background of card-tables and madly swirling dancers, delivering an eloquent plea for a Russia which should be true to its own soul.

In the final act the guests leave. The shallowness of society is again revealed by one of its most ardent supporters, Repitilov. Chatzky, determined to find out the reason for Sofia's coldness, conceals himself behind a column. Sofia herself walks stealthily above. Soon Molchalin, by an impassioned love speech to Liza, shows that his pretended affection for Sofia is only a piece of opportunism. This wretched declaration is overheard by Sofia, who of course is finally aroused from her sentimental dream. Chatzky too sees the tawdry vulgarity of the whole proceeding. Famusov, on the other hand, has only a single thought, the public disgrace of it all. At this Chatzky having delivered one final denunciation of the Moscow "four hundred" calls for his carriage in order to leave forever that whitened city. But after all this, does Famusov re

pent, as Catherine or Fonvizin would have had him do? No, absolutely no; his last words express an agonizing fear of what might be the opinion of the leader of his own social set. With this the great tragi-comedy comes to a close.

To Nikolay Vasilyevich Gogol⁷ it was given to usher in a new and greater era in the field of the comedy, and, more than that, to bring in a range of subjects hitherto unknown. "With Gogol there was expressed an entirely different tradition, even another element of Russian national life, which up to that time had not obtained influence in our literature—the Little Russian element."⁸ This new impulse was characterized by a certain colorfulness of treatment and brilliancy of imagination, the fruit of the more picturesque and colorful life of the villages of South Russia.⁹ Gogol left to posterity, besides a variety of juvenile and unfinished attempts, three complete comedies: *The Gamblers* (*Igrokhi*), *The Marriage*, and *The Revisor* (sometimes translated *The Inspector-General*), all of them the product of the third decade of the nineteenth century.

The Gamblers, never really a success, has for its central theme a narrative of how deception deceives the deceiver. Ikharev, the principal figure, is so fond of his pack of cards that he calls it by a feminine name, Adelaida Ivanovna. Because he has just won 80,000 rubles by cheating he thinks that deceiving people is a great art. His cards are so marked that he can tell any one of them by the backs fifteen feet away. Three professional sharpers, Krugel, Shvokhnev, and Utyeshitelny, pretend to be so astounded at his prowess that they invite him to join with them in bleeding a rich old fellow named Glov. The latter, having no time to play, leaves his son in the hands of the rogues with authority to draw on his father's account. Ikharev and the other three crooks proceed to win from the boy to the extent of 200,000 rubles. To cover, the lad gives an

⁷ For a biography of Gogol, see: N. V. Gogol, *ego Zhizn i Sochineniya*; V. I. Pokrovsky, *Gogol* (1829-1842), *Nestor Kotlyarevsky*.

⁸ Pypin, *Istoriya Russkoy Literatury*, vol. IV, p. 483.

⁹ See Kropotkin, *Ideals and Realities in Russian Literature*, p. 68.

I. O. U. payable later when the money comes. Ikharev buys this I. O. U. with his 80,000 rubles. Then he soliloquizes on how much easier it is to earn by trickery than by toil. Says he:

No, the mind is a great thing. In this world one must have discrimination. I look on life from an entirely different point of view. This living as the fool lives, that is not the trick; but to live with discrimination, with science, to deceive all and not to be deceived yourself—that is the problem of the present and the goal of the future.¹⁰

But the dénouement is swift. It develops that young Glov never had 200,000 rubles, that he was merely a decoy, and that the other three rogues had vanished with the 80,000 rubles. Ikharev, in the act of taking Glov to court, is reminded of the fact that he has himself played a crooked game and has therefore forfeited his judicial right to satisfaction. Young Glov derisively calls to the frantic man:

But you still have Adelaida Ivanovna.¹¹

The last scene, rather weak from the standpoint of art, reveals in the shape of Ikharev a completely disillusioned man.

The Marriage relates the adventures of a middle-aged wooer. Although quite amusing it is little more than a farce. The central character, Podkolesin, is prodded on by his friend toward marriage with a widow. In the end, however, he loses his nerve and escapes by jumping out of the window. The plot is not strong, for Podkolesin, unlike Sganarelle in Molière's *Le Mariage Forcé*, had only a weak desire to get married in the first place. Throughout the play he is too feeble a personality to be really interesting. The climax is anything but vigorous. It seems to the writer, therefore, that those¹² who have found any deep significance in the piece have gone too far afield. It is more probable that the play was written for relaxation dur-

¹⁰ Scene 23.

¹¹ Scene 25.

¹² For example, cf. Nestor Kotlyarevsky, *Gogol*, pp. 291-296.

ing the time of the exacting toil expended on *The Revizor*. From the standpoint of humor it is, nevertheless, worth while.

The Revizor will be outlined briefly later.¹³ It deserves to be read entire by anyone who cares to read even one Russian drama.¹⁴ It is a thoroughly amusing and illuminating picture of a typical group of Russian bureaucrats, caught in the act of pursuing their nefarious trade. Because the play was so gripping and the picture so real, stormy conflicts soon after its appearance were surging through the literary world.¹⁵ Critics were divided into two bitterly hostile camps, each side vieing with the other in zeal. Bitter taunts were uttered which pained the sensitive introspective spirit of the author and changed the subsequent course of his life. But the passing of the years and the coming of changed conditions have swept all this away, and *The Revizor* is accepted to-day to be as nearly true to life as any great satire can possibly be.

¹³ See page 36.

¹⁴ English translations: Gogol, *The Inspector-General*, tr., A. A. Sykes, W. Scott, London, 1892; Gogol, *Revizor, a Comedy*, tr., Max S. Mandell, Tuttle, Morehouse, and Taylor, New Haven, 1908 (a good edition for acting, considerably altered); Gogol, *The Inspector-General, a Comedy in Five Acts*, tr., Thomas Seltzer, A. A. Knopf, New York, 1916.

¹⁵ See *Sochineniya, N. V. Gogolya*, St. Petersburg, Tip. Samoobra-zovaniye, vol. VI, p. 28.

CHAPTER II

WESTERN INFLUENCES

Since there is such a dearth of information available in English, French, or German, a short discussion of western influences on the Russian comedy from Catherine to Gogol may help further to introduce the subject of humor. From many angles the literary period from 1760 to 1840 may be said to have been the final process in the creation of a truly Russian literature. Accused with justice of being largely imitative it nevertheless completed the task of laying a firm foundation for that mighty train of artists who followed Pushkin. In the narrower field of the comedy the work was no less fundamental. The literature of western Europe, especially that of France, was combed for plots and ideas. It must indeed be constantly kept in mind that the minor authors of comedy imitated the west to an even greater degree than those who are given consideration here. The purpose of this chapter, then, is not to make an exhaustive study of this vast subject but merely to give a résumé of some of the work that has been done in this direction, since so little of it is written in a western language. In addition the writer will add some of his own observations, especially in regard to Molière and Sheridan.

The Russian theatre, from its founder Volkov and its early director Sumarokov (1756) to Catherine, adopted from the French its types and subjects which it tried to endow with the characteristics of Russian manners and customs. Hypocrites, pettifoggers, and chicaners, even definite persons¹ known to the public, were the objects of the satire in these early days. These productions, because they were such

¹ For example, in the comedy *Tresotinius* Sumarokov represented Tredyakovsky in the likeness of a ridiculous pedant occupying himself with trifles in orthography. Tredyakovsky (1703-1769) was a splendid student in school and a tireless worker but not at all original or gifted. He translated into Russian Rollin's *Ancient History* in thirteen volumes and numerous other works.

a mixture of the native and the foreign, were entirely devoid of unity and often gave a queer impression.² When we come to the comedies of Catherine we find that although they are the work of a non-Russian, they actually contain a larger portion of the native element than do those of Sumarokov. The country of her adoption interested her keenly and she constantly studied its manners and customs. It is a fact, furthermore, that her mastery of the Russian language was greater than is popularly supposed and her chief mistakes were merely grammatical errors. She was not, indeed, foreign to the inner spirit of the Russian speech, nor did she, as is often insinuated, write in French what her secretary afterwards translated into Russian.³

A further interesting fact is that Catherine was a western princess whose early reading had comprehended the best books of the most advanced nations. In this connection we may note that she made a free translation of the first seven scenes of Calderón's *El Escondido y la Tarada*.⁴ According to her usual custom she changed the names into some sort of Russian. Thus Don César becomes Sevin, Mosquito becomes Moisey, Otañez appears as Otanov, Don Diego as Diegin, and Don Felix as Felov.

Catherine was a close student of Shakespere. His dramatization of a historical personage fascinated her, and this influence is felt especially in her two dramas, *From the Life of Rurik* and *The Ancient Rule of Oleg*, where, in defiance of the classical restrictions, she boldly calls each play "an imitation of Shakespere, without the maintenance of the usual rules." That she dared to say this in an age when pseudoclassicism reigned supreme is a tribute to the boldness of her character. That on top of this she actually did change the scene of action in every one of those ten acts, shows that she intended to outdo the great Shakespere at his own game. It is more than likely, of course, that she was encouraged to take this step by the great revivals which were taking place in Germany subsequent to the *Götz von Ber-*

² V. Savodnik, *Kratkiy kurs istorii russkoy slovesnosti*, p. 368.

³ *Sochineniya Imperatritzy Ekateriny*, II, Vvedenskago, p. 5.

⁴ *Sochineniya Ekateriny*, II, Red. Pypina, vol. III, p. 396 ff.

lichingen of Goethe. In 1786 Catherine wrote an imitation of Shakespere entitled *The Spendthrift* (*Rastochitel'*). Besides these, she reworked *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and it appeared in the Russian as *A Basket and a Washing*. The combination of two such discordant elements as an English plot and a Russian framework ended in chaos. This attempt does show, however, the interest Catherine had in Shakespere,⁵ an interest which can be substantiated by internal evidence as well. For earlier and more original plays from her pen likewise display a regard for him. Thus, the cynical and materialistic ideas of Spesov concerning marriage, the opinions of Hedkulov, and to a lesser degree those of Gremykin, in *The Name-day of Madam Vorchalkina*, are balanced by the speeches of Slender in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, while Firlyufyushkov speaks a mixture of French and Russian, just as Dr. Caius speaks a conglomeration of French and his mother tongue.⁶

In this connection it must also be mentioned that in 1787, only a decade after its appearance in England, Catherine translated into Russian a fragment of Sheridan's *School for Scandal*. This again proves the interest she had in the English drama.

The impression must not be left, however, that Catherine was really much ahead of her time in her attitude to the principles of pseudoclassicism. She may have been a daring spirit in some of her less important plays, but, as was indicated in the résumés of her two more effective comedies in the previous chapter,⁷ she followed, in her best efforts, the traditional French comedy as exemplified in Molière. She

⁵ Veselovsky, *Zapadnove Vliyanie v Novoy Russkoy Literatury*, p. 94.

⁶ For the speeches of Herkulov and Spesov and Gremykin, see Catherine, *The Name-day of Madam Vorchalkina*, II, 2 and IV, 5. For Slender, see *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, I, 1. For an example of the jargon of Dr. Caius, see *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, I, 4. For further light on the subject of Shakespere and the Russian drama, see: Sergey Tilofeyev, *Vliyanie Shekspera na Russkuyu Dramu*, Moscow, 1887. For Catherine and Shakespere, see: V. Lebedev, *Sheksper v Pere-dyelnakh Ekateriny*, II, v R. Vvestnikye, 1878, no. 3.

⁷ See pp. 5, 6, 7.

did this not only in the choice of character types but also in the development of the subject. As an instance, take Molière's well-known sallies against doctors. It is a fact that he wrote several comedies, largely for the purpose of ridiculing the medical profession of his day.⁸ In his case the weakness can be pardoned, for his delicate health and frail constitution did not respond to the prescriptions of the physicians. He therefore became embittered against them. Catherine, however, had no such excuse; yet Madam Vorchalkina, supposed to be a pure Slavic type, comes out with this remark about doctors:

And for what a surgeon and a doctor? . . . I wouldn't want the honorable surgeons and doctors to find out where I live: on making their acquaintance you don't live as long as I hope to live.⁹

The borrowings of Fonvizin are easier to trace than those of any other author of our group. Although his sources are numerous, they are confined almost entirely to the Danish author Holberg, and to the French authors from Molière on. One would suppose that after such polemics¹⁰ as Fonvizin wrote against the French people themselves, he would have scorned to appropriate their ideas. That he was unable to see the irony of the situation constituted one of his most serious defects. How a man, furthermore, who claimed to believe in education could judge the great Frenchmen of the eighteenth century by their petty weaknesses¹¹ is a problem in mental aberration. For when we come to his own works we find in that famous geographical examination, that Mitrofan's answer is contained almost word for word in a work of that much-despised Voltaire, *Jeanot et Colin*; while one of the most penetrating sallies in *The Choice of a Tutor*, also by Fonvizin, is taken from the meditations of La Beaumelle.¹² Both of these are among his latest works, written after 1778, the year of his first journey abroad and

⁸ Cf. Brander Matthews, *Molière*, p. 192.

⁹ *The Name-day of Madam Vorchalkina*, Act III, scene 7.

¹⁰ *Sochineniya D. I. Fonvizina*, p. 351.

¹¹ *Sochineniya D. I. Fonvizina*, pp. 362, 363.

¹² Vesolovsky, *Zapadnoye Vliyaniye v Novoy Russkoy Literatury*, p. 97.

consequently after he had written his scathing denunciations against France.

Korion, an early play of Fonvizin dating from about 1764, shows this same imitative tendency. Although the title does not acknowledge the plagiarism, the whole piece is nothing more than a free translation from the *Sidnei* of Gresset, a Frenchman of a slightly earlier generation. Whereas Cathérine was wise enough to imitate Shakespere, Sheridan, and Calderón, Fonvizin made the unfortunate selection of Gresset, a man of small talent. And even then he wrote worse than his inspirer. Take the following as an example; the final lines of Dumont, the manservant:

Malgré tout le jargon de la philosophie, malgré tous les chagrins, ma foi, vive le vie!¹³

are made considerably less forceful in those words of Andrey, the manservant:

No matter how much we may chance to grieve, yet we wish to live as long as possible.¹⁴

Or that passage of conversation between Sganarelle and Pancrace where the latter, after asking Sganarelle whether he wished to speak in some ten foreign languages, says in regard to his native tongue:

Passez donc de l'autre côté; car cette oreille-ci est destinée pour les langues scientifiques et étrangères, et l'autre est pour la maternelle.¹⁵

How much finer feeling for the comic it displays than the closely related passage from Fonvizin which begins:

BRIGADIRSHA (mother of Ivanushka). Our business is to find a bride for you and it is yours to marry her. Already you are trying to get out of doing your duty.

THE SON. How's this, ma mère, am I to marry, and isn't there any need for me to have anything to do with the choice of the bride?

BRIGADIRSHA. Indeed. And how did your father get married? And how did I marry him? We never heard about each other even

¹³ *Sidnei*, last scene.

¹⁴ Fonvizin, *Korion*, III, 5.

¹⁵ Molière, *Le Mariage Forcé*, scene 4.

by report. Never in all my life before the wedding did I speak with him, and something like two weeks after the wedding I just began to speak with him in a very gradual manner.

THE SON. Probably that's why you have had so much to say to each other ever since.¹⁶

But the author who had the greatest influence on this same comedy, *The Brigadier*, was not a Frenchman, but a Dane, Ludwig Holberg, often called the Danish Molière, or the father of modern Danish literature. The tales of this writer had been translated in 1761 by Fonvizin in his university days, while to go farther back, it had been a play of Holberg which he saw on the Petersburg stage in 1758, *Henry and Pernilla* by name, which in all probability had helped him to choose his vocation.

The Brigadier of Fonvizin certainly owes much to the *Jean de France* of Holberg. Because of its extreme inaccessibility in America I quote from Veselovsky's erudite study of the subject:

In the piece of Holberg appear in exactly the same manner two old men who have decided among themselves to marry off their children; the daughter of one of them is horrified at the prospect of marrying a giddy fellow who has been in Paris; she herself loves a young man toward whom, up to that time, her father has been very cool (this pale young fellow, corresponding to Dobrolyubov in the Russian piece, has a name very similar to his in the German *Liebhold*).

At great length Veselovsky analyzes the details of the likeness, comparing Ivanushka to the lover in the play of Holberg, etc. . . . In general, he says, however:

We admit that with Fonvizin there are many leanings away from the prototype, many original and clever remarks and especially a remarkable closeness to actual Russian life (in the stories of the brigadier and his wife about military life and of the councillor's wife about judicial service). The Russian play is much more bold, but for this reason falls all the more sharply into caricaturization.¹⁷

The influence of western literature on Griboyedov is at once more subtle and less obvious than in the case of

¹⁶ Fonvizin, *The Brigadier*, V, 1.

¹⁷ Veselovsky, *op. cit.*, pp. 97, 98.

Catherine or Fonvizin. One cannot say with the same security that he was influenced by a certain book, because like Shakespere himself he never slavishly imitated. Understanding rather clearly the real meaning of the west he always elaborated and embellished a borrowed idea until it was really his own. A close student of Shakespere, he learned from the master how to put a world of meaning behind a few simple phrases. And it is this fundamental method of treatment whereby he was able in one short play to describe Moscow society in the epoch of Alexander I with a fidelity, in spirit at least, as great as Tolstoy in *War and Peace* was able to do in four volumes. It is this all-embracing method of treatment rather than scattered expressions and ideas that are the fruit of his study of the greatest English playwright.

From Sheridan Griboyedov gathered hints on the successful handling of the social comedy. The thinly veiled satire in the mind of the writer of the dialogue between Famusov and Liza in which the former expresses his opinions on the uselessness of novel reading is closely akin to that of the author of the dialogue between Lydia and her maid in *The Rivals*.¹⁸ We must concede, however, that Griboyedov, living in an age when sentimentalism was on the wane, treated Sofia with much less earnestness than Sheridan treated Julia, for example. Sofia is to be pitied for her simplicity, but such is the atmosphere of *The Rivals* that Julia can speak to her lover in these words with perfect naturalness:

Then on the bosom of your wedded Julia, you may lull your keen regret to slumbering; while virtuous love, with a cherub's hand, shall smooth the brow of upbraiding thought and pluck the thorns from compunction.¹⁹

To *Die Abderiten* of Wieland Griboyedov may be indebted for the theme of the young man who returns to his native land after years of absence abroad, three in the case of Chatzky, and twenty in that of Demokritos. In both of the places described, in Abdera as well as in

¹⁸ See *The Misfortune of Being Clever*, I, 4, and *The Rivals*, I, 2.

¹⁹ *The Rivals*, V, 1.

Moscow, people are anxious to have their own pet illusions justified, instead of learning the truth.²⁰ It is the old story of the effect of a deadening "Main Street" on a young man of vision. Again, the cheap and tawdry interest which the citizens of Abdera showed in art and music may well be compared with Chatzky's opinion of the vaporous futility of the high society of Moscow.²¹ It is also interesting to note that just as *The Misfortune of Being Clever* teems with French words so does *Die Abderiten*.²²

Certainly some of the more revolutionary elements in *The Misfortune of Being Clever* owe something to the French dramatists who presaged the Revolution. But of all the French dramatists who influenced him in any way, it was Molière more than any other who served as his inspiration. The simplicity of Sofia in *The Misfortune of Being Clever*, although hardly so delicate, has a point of contact with the innocence of Agnes in Molière's *L'école des Femmes*. The restrained humor of the rhymed verses suggests such influence. The resemblance, however, is greatest between Alceste, the hero of *Le Misanthrope* and Chatzky, whose last words are respectively:

Trahi de toutes parts, accablé d'injustices,
Je vais sortir d'un gouffre où triomphent les vices,
Et chercher sur la terre un endroit écarté
Où d'être homme d'honneur on ait la liberté.

And in really untranslatable Russian:

Away from Moscow! Never shall I return. I flee, unheeding I
go to search over the world for a place

Where there is a corner for outraged feelings!
My carriage, bring me my carriage!

This similarity between the last words of the two characters is indicative of the relation which exists between

²⁰ See Wieland, *Die Abderiten*, p. 90.

²¹ See *Die Abderiten*, p. 26, and *The Misfortune of Being Clever*, II, 5.

²² For example, on p. 99, Wieland uses the word *attitude*, and again on p. 215. In the former case he feels bound to plead jocularly: "Ein Fremdes Wort! Ich bitte es den Puristen ab."

their more complete developments throughout the two plays. We quote from a recent article on the subject:

Le misanthrope et le malheur de l'esprit ont même fond: un tableau satirique de la société mondaine; même sujet le conflit entre des âmes éprises de sincérité; de probité, et les vices du temps; même élément psychologique: un amour malheureux. L'observation de la règle des unités, l'emploi du vers, l'alternance des tableaux de mœurs et débats d'idées ou de passion, qui jalonnent les trois ou quatre épisodes d'une crise sentimentale maintes rencontrés de détail, la forme presque identique de dénouement et de l'adieu jeté à un monde pervers évoquent à chaque instant le modèle français.²³

To hunt out the western sources of influence on Gogol is a still more elusive undertaking, for although he spent many of the later years of his life in western Europe, he took relatively little interest in the active life about him. Furthermore, his comedies, written in the period before he went abroad, betray more of Little Russian wit than of sympathy with the methods of Shakespere, or of Molière. He could not, however, entirely escape the influence of the west which was so keenly felt throughout the literary circles of which he desired to be a member. Although he did not himself know much of foreign languages, yet he could not fail to absorb, through translations and the conversation of friends, something of the western spirit. It is said to have been Pushkin who urged him to break away from the shallow little sallies of country wit and to consider the deathless message of Cervantes who, because of his knowledge of humanity, lived long after the exciting cause of his great satire was forgotten. Quite possibly too it was a desire to follow Shakespere which induced Gogol to take a theme from early English history for his uncompleted play *Alfred*. According to Veselovsky²⁴ this effort was based on Hallam's work.

The Gamblers of Gogol is an adaptation of a theme common enough in western European literature, that of the wiles of a card-sharper. Especially in Spain, even before the days of Cervantes, many tales were written about the

²³ J. Patouillet, in *Revue des Etudes Slaves*, Tome 2, p. 288.

²⁴ Veselovsky, *op. cit.*, p. 214.

clever tricks of this particular kind of roguery. In Gogol's play this same thread was elaborated into a finished story. One of the main attractions of this play to the western reader, therefore, is the watching of the way in which a Russian handles a theme already familiar to the west.

The Marriage, to an even less degree than *The Gamblers*, can be said to have an original plot. Many farces and light comedies had been written about an aging bachelor who suddenly undertakes to get married. Here again, the chief interest for a westerner is the handling of an old theme by an artist of Slavic temperament.

Over and above all this, Gogol's fame as a writer of comedy must rest not on these mediocre productions, whatever their sources, but solely on *The Revizor*. In fact, this play together with *The Misfortune of Being Clever* are the only comedies from this whole period which are worthy to be compared with the best work of Shakespere, Molière, Lope de Vega, or even with Lessing's *Minna von Barnhelm*.

Khlestakov in *The Revizor* is to be compared with Mascarille in Molière's *Les Précieuses*. In a similar manner does Khlestakov, an underling, pretend to be a man of importance and high literary attainments.²⁵ Also, as Merimée long ago pointed out, the scene in the last act of *The Revizor* where the letter of Khlestakov is read without his knowledge or permission is similar to the same episode in the last scene of *Le Misanthrope*.²⁶ Thus the dénouement of both plays may be said to have been brought about by the same artifice.

Just as after the production of so daring a piece as *L'école des Femmes*, Molière felt it necessary to write some sort of apology to counteract fierce criticism, so did Gogol write his *Theatrical Dénouement* (*Teatralnaya Razvyazka*) to vindicate his position. Molière's defense is based on common sense. He shows that *L'école des Femmes* is immoral and shocking only to artificial standards. He admits that the question is really so complex that it cannot be

²⁵ *The Revizor*, III, 6, and *Les Précieuses Ridicules*, scene 9.

²⁶ Veselovsky, *op. cit.*, p. 214.

settled with finality. Gogol, on the other hand, tortured in spirit because of the fierce criticism which his *Revizor* had aroused, displays a method of answering his critics that is thoroughly earnest. In *The Theatrical Dénouement* he satirizes the way in which people go to the theatre to see others ridiculed, not honestly to examine their own shortcomings. He shows that satire really has a place in life in exposing men's faults to themselves. At the end it is revealed that Khlestakov represents the worldly deceived conscience which believes that it is actually gaining by its career of falsehood. The revizor himself represents the day of judgment. In general, we find that Gogol's underlying motive, different from Molière's genial worldliness, is deeply religious.

CHAPTER III

HUMOR THROUGH THE MEDIUM OF JOKES

Since the joke is a relatively ignoble and simple vehicle of humor, found most commonly in crude and primitive drama, a study of the development of humor in the Russian comedy very naturally commences with the joke as the first subject under consideration.

The comic dramas of Catherine are especially rich in jokes, the majority of them of a character that could be understood outside of Russia as well as at home. They are frequently the usual ones of the comedy of manners. Thus when in her comedy *O Time* the intelligence of a certain silent girl is questioned, the usual succession of jokes follows:

If she is stupid, it is by inheritance. For the lady, her grandmother, is not over wise; the apple falls not far from the apple-tree.

And a little later in the same scene the remark is made:

Wonders of wonders! And you have found a silent girl in Moscow! ¹

Catherine had a sprightly mind and she liked her fun but her work is always shallow. She employs the rather easy method of laughing at the incongruous around her, without worrying too much about reform. Like the modern writers of farce, she used every art to produce a laugh. The very fact that she often forgot to clinch the moral teaching in her comedies, constituted her most powerful claim to the attention of the general reader.² The dull formalism of her Khanzhakhina, for example, amuses the reader just as

¹ Catherine, *O Time*, I, 12.

² How far such a point of approach was removed from the general practice of the authors of her age can be judged from the words of Kotlyarevsky: "Our authors of the eighteenth century were to a large degree didactics, who valued in their work most of all the spiritual edification which was therein contained." . . . Kotlyarevsky, *Literary Movements of the Epoch of Alexander*, p. 5.

it had once amused Catherine, yet so humorously is she presented that the sermon against hypocrisy which she really is intended to be, fails to make itself obnoxious.

Many of the jokes of Fonvizin cluster around the general subject of education, or the lack of it, in Russia.³ If we bear in mind the fact that the teachers themselves were coarse and dull, as often as not ex-coachmen, it is little to be wondered at that the councillor's wife says in all seriousness:

Isn't it true that in France live for the most part Frenchmen?

To this Ivanushka replies, according to the note, "with ecstasy":

Vous avez le don de deviner.⁴

This woman wanted to learn at least, but Taras Skotinin (whose name suggests membership in the family of animals, Mr. Beastly perhaps in English), scion though he was of an ancient provincial family, had no such revolutionary desires. He can best explain himself:

Yes, to prove that education is nonsense, let us take the case of my uncle Vavila Filelyeyevich. Nobody ever heard about grammar from him, nor did he want to hear anything about it from anybody else, but, my goodness, what a head he did have.

"What kind of head?" asked the stern old Pravdin, who never fathomed a joke in his life.

Well, here is what chanced to happen to him. Astride a speedy ambler, and drunk at that, he ran into the stone gate. The man was tall, the archway was low, he forgot to bow,—and so then he hit his head on the gate, thus the back of my uncle's head was bent clear back to the saddle, and the brave steed bore him through the gate to the front of his own house all the while bent backwards. I should like to know whether there is upon this earth a learned pate which would not have been crushed by such a blow, but my uncle, be it said to his eternal memory, upon sobering up only asked, "Is the gate unharmed?"⁵

Fonvizin also made very liberal use of jokes that deal with marriage. In fact, in *The Brigadier* we have a whole

³ Fonvizin, *Sochineniya*, p. 231.

⁴ Fonvizin, *The Brigadier*, III, 3.

⁵ Fonvizin, *The Minor*, IV, 8.

play honeycombed with marital infidelity. Almost everybody that is married falls in love with someone who belongs to somebody else. Occasionally a couple of them pursue one willing victim. In the whirl of the ensuing excitement time is still found to rail at one's own mate and to praise the wife of another. All of the troubles of life seem to come from that person whom the law has maliciously fastened upon a poor, innocent mortal. Ivanushka even adduces this evidence:

He (the father) did not believe that there was a devil until his marriage; however, after having married my mother he soon came to believe that an unclean spirit does really exist.⁶

But in praising the wife of someone else, both the brigadier and councillor wax eloquent. Says the councillor:

Do you know what a brainy companion you have? She is worthy to be the president of the whole board. My, what a woman she is.⁷

Fonvizin was at heart an ardent Russian and his especial contempt was reserved for those who slavishly aped French manners and customs. Thus he satirizes the councillor's wife in *The Brigadier* for this very affectation:

How fortunate our daughter is! She is going to marry a man who has been to Paris. Oh, joy, oh joy! I well know how it is to live with a man who has never been to Paris.⁷

There are other jokes with the same intent, in fact Ivanushka is himself a joke of the first order. All he lives for is to rail against Russia and to glorify the external virtues of France, with no more appreciation or understanding of the real France than the aforementioned Skotinin.

The satire against a woman who is superstitiously avaricious is continued in the person of Madam Prostakov who has a part in Fonvizin's best play, *The Minor*. It is then the humor of derision and disgust that is displayed when she, wildly waving her arms, turns to her husband and cries:

What do you mean he didn't die! What are you trying to fool me for? Can it be that you don't know that some years ago at my

⁶ *The Brigadier*, I, 3.

⁷ *The Brigadier*, I, 1.

behest they put him in the church books! Then my sinful prayers did not turn out any better than that!⁸

There are also the common jokes which turn on a misunderstanding either of a foreign language, as when the wife of the brigadier thinks her son is swearing an oath when he is only speaking French;⁹ or on the context of a conversation, as when Taras Skotin, hearing his name mentioned casually, takes it as a term of address and comes clear in to say, "Here I am."¹⁰

The presumption of servants in aping their masters is also made use of to obtain a laugh. One of them holds forth in this fashion:

Above all, we always find in your house wise people, knowing people who, like us, are in a position to put the whole world into words, people of high thoughts and with clever artifices, in a word, people like ourselves, rambles.¹¹

There are, furthermore, jokes based on the prejudices or absurd mental aberrations of some character. Thus one old lady explains her opposition to a marriage in these words:

I dislike all lovers from nature, and where I hear only of love, there an enemy pops up.¹²

Besides these easily recognized jokes, there is to be found in Catherine and to a less degree in Fonvizin a large group of pithy sayings, old proverbs, or simply bits of homely philosophy. It is indicative of her real interest in Russian life that Catherine saw fit to employ these at a time when they had not been considered of any value at all. Here are some which she included:

He who pursues many hares will often not catch one.¹³

What the sober man keeps in his mind the drunken man keeps on his tongue.¹⁴

⁸ *The Minor*, I, 6.

⁹ *The Brigadier*, II, 5.

¹⁰ *The Minor*, II, 2.

¹¹ *The Name-day of Madam Vorchalkina*, I, 3.

¹² *O Time*, III, 3.

¹³ *The Name-day of Madam Vorchalkina*, I, 1.

¹⁴ *The Name-day of Madam Vorchalkina*, I, 3.

Put your trust in God, but don't get careless yourself.¹⁵
 Don't spit in the well, you may chance to drink the water.¹⁶

As we have stated above, the proverbs of Fonvizin are less in number. The following list is almost exhaustive:

The fool may lie as much as he wishes, nobody will pay any attention to him.¹⁷

The dog howls and the wind blows.¹⁸

God is high up and the Tzar is afar off.¹⁹

There are other jokes of various kinds in the comedy of Catherine's day, but our chief interest in them lies in noting that while they were employed with telling effect from the strictly humorous standpoint, yet they do not always, indeed rarely do they, blend into the context in which they are placed. The task of learning how to fit these elements into a single organic unity lay ahead of the writers of comedy in Russia.

Much of the humor in the great comedy of Griboyedov is related to that of Catherine and Fonvizin. Jokes about marriage more smoothly and delicately told are still considered effective:

There's a certain Princess Lasova here, a widow, and a horsewoman — she doesn't attract many cavaliers to ride with her — one day she had a bad smash: her jockey let her down — he was apparently counting the flies. She was ungainly before so they say, and now she's a rib short, so she's on the lookout for a prop in the shape of a husband.²⁰

Liza, the personal maid of Sofia, in *The Misfortune of Being Clever*, has a rather hard time arranging all the intrigues that are necessary if she is to conceal her mistress' relations with Molchalin, the secretary of her father. This leads her to observe with some heat:

Ah! Keep clear of the gentlemen! Be ready for trouble with them at any time. The Lord deliver us from the greatest of all afflictions — a gentleman's anger and a gentleman's love! ²¹

¹⁵ *The Name-day of Madam Vorchalkina*, III, 8.

¹⁶ *The Name-day of Madam Vorchalkina*, II, 5.

¹⁷ *The Brigadier*, IV, 4.

¹⁸ *The Minor*, III, 7.

²⁰ *The Misfortune of Being Clever*, II, 9.

¹⁹ *The Brigadier*, III, 6.

²¹ *The Misfortune of Being Clever*, I, 2.

There are in this same play two instances when the advice of an older man to a younger, although not meant to be funny, sounds more like a joke to us than like serious counsel. In the first case, Famusov gives the following advice to Chatzky who has applied for the hand of his daughter:

I should tell you not to be a fool (which in this case meant that he should give up his liberal ideas and not refuse to cringe before those high officials who had it in their power to give him advancement); secondly, not to neglect your property; and last but not least, to enter the service.²²

In the second case, Molchalin, the very antithesis of Chatzky, explained his theory of success:

My father bequeathed me some advice: first and foremost, make yourself agreeable without exception—to the master of the house in which you live, to the man who brushes his clothes, to the porter and the doorkeeper, and in order to avoid trouble, you should make friends with the doorkeeper's dog.²³

As in the earlier comedies, many of the jokes center about a servant and her love intrigues. In one place Molchalin and Liza present a variation of a familiar theme when the supposed lover of the mistress pays tribute to the "mournful beauty" of the maid.²⁴ Later Liza's rôle becomes still more complicated when Famusov, the master of the house, begins to show a disposition to flirt with her. Once, forgetting himself, he says with pompous self-satisfaction:

Look at me: I don't want to boast about my constitution, but I'm hale and hearty in spite of my gray hairs: I'm a free man, a widower, my own master, . . . and yet I'm renowned for my asceticism!

Here Liza was about to interrupt him with reminders of his past conduct. She began:

I take the liberty, sir . . .

But Famusov retorted with that time-worn argument of vested conversatism:

²² i.e., to work for the state; *The Misfortune of Being Clever*, II, 2.

²³ *The Misfortune of Being Clever*, IV, 12.

²⁴ *The Misfortune of Being Clever*, IV, 12.

Silence! It's a dreadful age! You don't know what they'll be up to! Everybody's forward, and the girls are the worst of the lot! ²⁵

Such a bewildering array of attentions quite confused poor Liza and inspired terror in her toward all males. She cried:

Well, all the people in these parts! She wants him and he wants me! And I, . . . I'm the only one who's mortally afraid of love! And it seems to me that I've gone and fallen in love with Petrusha, the butler! ²⁶

Not all the jokes in Griboyedov, however, could find prototypes in the age of Catherine. His life was spent almost entirely during its active years in the reign of Alexander I, an era when the breach between the conservative and liberal forces widened appreciably. The early humanitarian efforts of Alexander had served to encourage the young liberals to do some original thinking. When, however, the emperor became absorbed in foreign affairs and forgot the needs of his people, a period of cynicism and dissatisfaction settled down upon Russia. The younger element, personified by Griboyedov in Chatzky, looked forward to the future in which they hoped to see their propaganda of agitation to bear fruit. On the other hand, the older generation, represented especially by Famusov, turned their eyes backward to the glittering age of Catherine. Both sides of the unavoidable conflict are given a hearing in *The Misfortune of Being Clever*.

The following description of Famusov's uncle reveals a sympathetic understanding of a representative of the old order:

He ate from gold, not silver, with a hundred servants in livery to wait on him; he always drove six horses; he spent his life at the court . . . and what a court! Very different from what it is nowadays. He was at the Court of the Empress Catherine. And in those days the men of importance . . . big, heavy men they were too . . . didn't simply nod their heads . . . they bowed properly. A grandee in high favor seemed to be of different flesh and blood from other men, and to be nourished on different food. And my uncle was

²⁵ *The Misfortune of Being Clever*, I, 4.

²⁶ *The Misfortune of Being Clever*, II, 14.

like a prince or a count! He had a serious air and a haughty bearing, but when he wanted to get into favor he could bend himself double. One day, at a levee, he happened to stumble, and fell so heavily that he nearly cracked his skull. The old man began to groan, his voice was hoarse . . . he was favored with the Imperial smile . . . the Empress deigned to be amused. . . . And what d'ye think he did then? Picked himself up, pulled himself together, was going to make a bow . . . and fell again . . . this time on purpose. Shouts. He did just the same thing a third time. What d'ye think of that, eh? . . . Why, you men of the present day aren't in it with him! ²⁷

While at the same time this passage shows that Griboyedov knew well the heated sincerity of the younger men:

Now let us take one from our number, from the young men, and you will find an enemy of self-seeking, one who neither asks for a position nor for a promotion in rank, he leads his mind into the sciences, famished for learning, or else God himself awakens in his soul a zeal for the productive arts, the high and the beautiful ones, . . . whereat they at once shout: "Stop thief! Fire!" and at once you are counted by them as a dangerous dreamer.²⁸

However much Chatzky and Famusov were opposed to each other in most respects, it is significant to note that they agreed that Russia was good enough for the Russians without the addition of foreign frippery.

The jokes of Gogol are more difficult to pick out than those of any of our other authors. His whole attitude is humorous and his characters are funny in themselves, not exclusively because of what they happen to be doing. In his earlier comedies, however, the jokes are more easily isolated than in his later works. For example, in his play *The Gamblers* Ikharev, the card-sharper, says to the servant at an inn where he is engaging a room:

No noise? That's good, but aren't there enough of the cavalry flying about, I mean the jumping bugs?

The servant is ready for any eventuality:

That is, you mean to mention the presence of fleas? Don't worry about that. If a flea or a bug bites you we will be responsible: we stand on that.²⁹

²⁷ *The Misfortune of Being Clever*, II, 2.

²⁸ *The Misfortune of Being Clever*, II, 5.

²⁹ Gogol, *The Gamblers*, I, 1.

In a later play, *The Marriage*, we have, besides many of the usual jokes that the title might suggest, some sharp digs at the slowness of a mature bachelor in his matrimonial intrigues. After Podkolesin, who seeks a wife, has told the matchmaker to come another day, she cries out in exasperation:

If you want to go and look at her, go and look. You act as if you were going to look at merchandise.³⁰

A little later in the same scene she harasses him again:

You know, already there's a gray hair in your head, pretty soon you'll not be fit for family cares.

There is in this piece a good example of a pun on an absurd-sounding name. The lady remarks concerning one of her suitors:

Listen, how about this, if I marry him will I at once acquire the name of Agathe Tikhonovna Yaichnitza? Gracious, what a name!

This name would suggest to a Russian audience something like this: "Agathe, the daughter of Tikhon (the gentle, quiet, peaceful one), of the family Omelet."

In *The Marriage* we have also the humor of the incongruous. Kochkarev thinks he has met the aunt of the bride before, perhaps at the house of a certain Madam Biryushkina, who has had something happen to her, he cannot quite recall what. He thinks she is recently married, but the fact is that she has broken her leg.

And badly broken it. . . .

"Oh well," replies Kochkarev nonchalantly, "I remember, something or other happened: she either got married or she broke her leg."³¹

These jokes are of course not particularly distinctive or original. But in the supreme comedy of the period, the famous *Revizor*, Gogol has treated us to a more subtle brand. It is a high comedy which has for its theme an arraignment of the greatest curse of the time, wholesale corruption in official circles.³² Instead of revealing to us

³⁰ Gogol, *The Marriage*, I, 8.

³¹ *The marriage*, I, 18.

³² For an interesting review, from the liberal point of view, of the social satires from Kantemir to Gogol, roughly speaking, see: Dobrolyubov, *Sochineniya*, vol. I, pp. 97 ff.

one powerful personality, he has endeavored to attain his end by putting before our eyes a whole group of men who act as if they were but parts of a single machine. The entire play is a complete unity, there is not an extraneous line in it. Every humorous turn is there for a purpose, every little episode bears an evident relation to the rest of the comedy. The whole play, indeed, is a joke and a good one.

A group of corrupt officials received word that a chief inspector from Petersburg had come to town to check up on their sins. The mayor went to see him, found him living in apparent disguise in great poverty, and took him home to his own house where he was treated as an eminent personage. Both the wife and the daughter of the mayor fell in love with him. He promised favors to all the officials and took in return "loans." Finally he was compelled by urgent business to leave town. The officials thought they were safe because he had taken their money.

A letter he had mailed previous to his departure was read by the "faithful public" in general assembly convened. In this epistle he praised their gullibility and called them a "hospitable and benevolent people." He revealed, moreover, that he was in reality only a minor clerk and that such a gorgeous welcome had been a great surprise to him.

While they were all discussing this flippant letter, terrible in its complications, there came the word that the real revizor had arrived and was earnestly desirous of going over the public business with them. They must stand an investigation of their misdeeds without time to cover them up. . . . Consternation, fear, anger, and impotence, overcame them all at once. They could only stand transfixed.

Thus *The Revizor* actually holds its own under the most severe test to which a comedy can be subjected, that of being told in outline form. Humor is so bred into the very frame that even a short résumé appears not only funny, but also unified and progressive; the surprise ending as a vehicle for humorous effect is exemplified. If one were to summarize a comedy from the age of Catherine in this sketchy way, it would hardly seem funny, while a concise

outline of the plot could be thought out only with the greatest difficulty. There are too many loosely-placed episodes, too much material that should be omitted to obtain unity. The authors wrote disjointedly, hurriedly. Gogol, on the other hand born with a humorous turn of mind, and endowed by nature with a fine artistic sense, not only profited by the mistakes of his predecessors and the inspiration of friends like Pushkin, but in addition, he actually spent eight long years in writing and polishing his great drama.

In *The Revizor*, each one of the jokes fits into its own place, indispensable to the ebb and flow of episodes. For example, in the very first scene the mayor advises the judge as follows:

It is bad that there is drying in your very court-room so much rubbish, and that there is over the cupboard with the papers a hunting-whip. I know, you like the chase but it is better to take everything in its proper season and then, of course, when the inspector has gone away, you can hang it back again; also about that assessor of yours, . . . he, no doubt, is a knowing fellow, but he has a scent about him, as if he had just come out of a wine-fermenting plant, — this also is not good. A long while ago I wished to speak about this to you, but was diverted by I don't know what. There are remedies for this condition, if this is, as he says, actually his natural odor. You might advise him to eat onions or garlic or something else. If this be the case Kristian Ivanovich (the district physician) can help with various medical preparations.³³

So cleverly woven were these satirical jibes, and so well sustained was the humor throughout the play, that even the czar was not offended, but "was unusually good-natured, and laughed with all his might"³⁴ at the first performance of *The Revizor*.

In summarizing the general characteristics of our whole period we find that puns and jokes in their conventional forms are decidedly more numerous at the beginning than

³³ *The Revizor*, I, 1. In this same connection cf. the mayor's advice to the overseer of charitable institutions and the inspector of schools in this same scene, and to the postmaster in the next.

³⁴ N. V. Gogol: *Sochineniya i Pisma*, Tip. Samoobrazovaniye, vol. 6, p. 24.

at the end. Since a great humorous drama is characterized by its absence of puns and jokes rather than by their presence, the increasing perfection of the art more and more tended to force them out of the higher comedies into the less pretentious realm of farce. They were not suited to the requirements of the newer stage, for they do not possess the dramatic possibilities of a humorous situation, nor do they furnish the lively clashes which ensue when two or more different individuals engage in a snappy humorous dialogue. While it must be admitted that the jokes in the earlier comedies, taken simply as jokes, were really funny, yet, since progress in the art of comedy writing is marked not so much by the cleverness of isolated jokes as by the skill of the artist in weaving them into the play so that they become an integral part of the action, the early comedies of Catherine and Fonvizin fall far short of the excellence of *The Revizor*. For in this comedy the jokes are hardly jokes at all, rather funny stories which were once jokes in the author's mind, but which he has smoothed down, fused with the other elements of the comedy, and fashioned carefully to meet the requirements of one homogeneous plot.

CHAPTER IV

HUMOROUS SITUATIONS

One of the greatest weaknesses of comedy as an expression of life has always been its tendency to treat of groups of people rather than of dynamic individuals. Not long ago Bergson wrote that there is "this essential difference between tragedy and comedy, the former being concerned with individuals and the latter with classes."¹ A definition like this limits comedy to an inferior field of action, for it can never hope to treat of the most complex impulses of man. It must always take the simpler desires which are common to a considerable number of people and leave untouched the deep emotions which distinguish a certain personality from all the rest of his kind. The microscopic scrutiny of motives is not in its province. The moment it attempts to analyze these less obvious characteristics it is in danger of losing that spontaneity and color which have long been identified with the word comedy. The tragic point of view, on the other hand, has been that we are purified by witnessing the human suffering which must inevitably appear when we apply the glass to an individual life. Tragedy, then, is in a sense a search for truth, which if it becomes penetrating and exhaustive, may lead even beyond the limited space of a drama into a prolonged psychological endeavor to portray the subconscious mind, . . . witness Dostoevsky and the modern school in Russia. At least the results will be different from those achieved by the comedy, which, in order to insure the conventional happy ending, must be tinged by a certain optimistic view of life.

Catherine, whatever her faults, held consistently the comic point of view. She reasoned little, she prodded, and she poked fun at all sorts of evils, but in every situation we can hear a sly chuckle that belies the seriousness of the written word.

¹ H. L. Bergson, *Laughter*, p. 165.

Superstition was one of the favorite objects of Catherine's satirical thrusts. In *O Time* she everlastingly digs her highly superstitious subjects. Early in the play we are regaled with the sight of Khanzhakhina, an elderly woman, in great distress; she explains her fright:

I rushed to the spot and oh! to my horror . . . I poor sinner that I am! and I saw that there had fallen from the shelf the glazed pot, beloved by my husband, from which he always ate his milk gruel; it fell, my dear fellow, yes, and broke into bits; and nobody was in the room. This is not a good sign. I fear that I or my granddaughter may die.²

At another time this same Khanzhakhina was relating how a grasshopper had by his presence foretold the death of her husband.³ Another one of the same set, Chudikhina, was frightened from the room when she was told that thirty years before a man had died on the very spot where she was sitting.⁴

Frequently Catherine presents enlivening scenes where servant's love is held up to our view; and more where situations are made funny by absurd exaggeration. Nekopeykov (without a kopek), a man with enlarged imagination, proposed in all seriousness that they catch rats and sell their tails for ropes at an enormous profit. At this the ponderously sedate Dremov showed interest:

DREMOV: But won't they be rather short, not to speak of any thing else?

NEKOPEYKOV: For long ones we could entwine them with hemp, but besides it's perfectly evident that a rat's tail can bear a strain ten times greater than its thickness. Did you ever happen to hold a rat by the tail? The rat, of course, is much thicker than its tail, but the tail never pulls apart; why is not that feasible? . . .⁵

Nothing daunted, the man went on to explain a further plan of his for building a fleet of trading ships on government credit, the profits from which should go to the promoters!

² Catherine, *O Time*, I, 6.

³ *O Time*, II, 3.

⁴ *O Time*, III, 1.

⁵ *The Name-day of Madam Vorchalkina*, II, 7.

Some of Catherine's humorous situations are mere appeals to the low and brutish. They are frequently common horseplay, where a laugh is gained at the expense of some miserable victim of rowdyism. Her audiences probably enjoyed this strain of coarseness that runs through her work.

Another of Catherine's pet antipathies was all manner of secret gatherings, for she considered them ready instruments for stirring up disorder. She was for that reason opposed to the spread of freemasonry as it was then practised in Russia. Her comedies about masonry do not, therefore, present impartial observations, but there are all sorts of humorous situations in them. One of her satires on secret organizations bears the title *The Siberian Shaman*. In this play we have an instance of a tale of wondrous healing related by a servant:

My mistress became weak . . . she was simply starved. He (the shaman) brought her a certain herb tonic, but the phial was broken to pieces, and the servant, not daring to speak about it, changed it for a phial of clear water. Our mistress not knowing the change, kept drinking this water with a little spoon, and she got well.⁶

These examples of Catherine's satire, shallow and often without a basis of fact, show, at any rate, that the empress was not above seeing the funny side of life.

Fonvizin, it would appear, had slightly less of the whimsical in his make-up than did his empress. But he did have considerably more ability in the construction of the mechanical effects for his humorous situations. Certainly some of this facility was gained from his translations from Molière, Holberg, Ovid, and others, as well as from the influence of certain of his masters who were not coachmen either by trade or temperament, notably Professor Reichel. Among his first semi-original works was a reworking of a French play, *Sidnei*, by Gresset, under the title of *Korion*, which he brought out in 1764. Although it is little thought of by Russian critics it well illustrates Fonvizin's ability to make a mechanically smooth-running piece from the idea of someone else. The hero, Korion, because he has de-

⁶ *The Siberian Shaman*, I, 12.

ceived his sweetheart, retires to the country and takes what he supposes to be poison. Meanwhile his sweetheart has forgiven him and appears in company with his friend Menander. The hero is beside himself with remorse for his hasty act. In even-flowing couplets, which add to the melodramatic effect of his tragic flourishes, he cries:

I shall see you never more!
 A cruel fate is violently separating us!
 I have seen you, but alas, too late!

.

All is now lost, and I cannot hope for help:
 I drank a cruel poison and I await death.⁷

Then with the singular good fortune that usually awaits a hero it turns out that the poison was only water!

Although such a theme is not original, the success of these couplets proves that Fonvizin must have had a certain technical cleverness to enable him to adapt old material to a contemporary audience, and produce withal so effective a climax.

The Brigadier, usually considered to be a satire on all things foreign, has many humorous situations which depend for their success on our amusement at seeing the excesses to which their foolish affectation of French manners has led some of the characters. In the first act Ivanushka and the councillor's wife discuss with true-to-form ennui the boorishness of their Russian neighbors. For a Russian audience the effect is greatly heightened by the use of French roots with Russian endings, with the result that the language is stilted and unnatural. With all the rest goes the usual lack of respect of anything, and a shallow attempt to appear perfectly sophisticated.

The pair keep up their bored and contemptuous courtship, neither of them at all serious. They simply believe that in France it is the fashion to have "affairs."

Fonvizin followed his empress in satirizing the old times. In this connection he has created a funmaker in Taras Skotinin, a lover of the soil and of rural life as it was in

⁷ *Korion*, III, 3.

the so-called good old days. Even the lady of his choice was less beloved by this rustic than the pigs which she had inherited. Says Skotinin:

I love pigs, sister: and we have in the vicinity such enormous pigs that there is not one of them which, standing on his hind legs, wouldn't be higher than any one of us by a whole head.⁸

The harshness and cruelty of former days are satirized, not only as such conditions occurred among clownish swineherds, but also among people who might be expected to know better, government officials and the like. Madam Prostakov echoed an idea long prevalent among the nobility when she disclaimed all utility in the study of geography for a noble because he could order his coachman to take him wherever he wished to go without himself knowing the route.⁹ A little later in the same act Madam Prostakov admitted the propriety of bribery.

To offset this unscrupulous type, Fonvizin created Starodum to be an exemplar of the old Russian virtues, a Russian Cato, and the mouthpiece of his own philosophy, rather than the object of his satire.¹⁰

But with regard to the humorous situation as handled by the next important writer of comedies, we find that Griboyedov knew very well that a funny scene is made doubly so if the speaker seems to be unaware of the laughter he is provoking. Thus Sofia in *The Misfortune of Being Clever* declares:

"We sit until it is quite light out of doors, and how do you think we occupy ourselves?"

The servant is discreetly ignorant.

"God knows, miss! It's no business of mine."

Sofia replies artlessly:

"He takes my hand and presses it to his heart, he sighs from the depths of his soul, and he never ventures on the least impropriety. . . and that's how we pass the whole night . . . hand in hand, his eyes fixed on me."

⁸ *The Minor*, I, 5.

⁹ *The Minor*, IV, 8.

¹⁰ Starodum is probably the literary personification of the father of Fonvizin. For a discussion of this point, see: Borozdin *et al.*, *Istoriya Russkoy Literatury*, Moskva, 1908, p. 412.

All this has been spoken in the most serious tone. Indeed, when poor Sofia sees that it is being taken in a different light, she is genuinely puzzled and asks:

You're laughing! What possible reason have I given you to laugh like that? ¹¹

The humor in this situation is of a refined sort, lying quite as much in the naïveté of Sofia as in the absurdity of her tale. Thus a situation which might have degenerated into vulgarity is so skillfully handled that it becomes delicately and pathetically funny.

Sofia is a humorous character because of her too romantic nature. Not so the Princess Tugoukhovsky, mother of six daughters, for each of whom she was seeking a husband. Chatzky, she hit upon as just the right man for her purpose. He had been abroad, was young and unmarried. She was all enthusiasm . . . until she discovered that he had not the distinction of being a Gentleman of the King's Bedchamber and that he was certainly not rich. Upon learning this she fairly shrieked at the prince, who had been sent to make the young gentleman's acquaintance,

Prince, prince! Come back! ¹²

Although this situation comes close to being common in its application, it is valuable in relieving the monotony of the long dialogues among Famusov, Chatzky, and Skalozub.

Not all the humor of this drama, however, is farcical. Griboyedov has also worked out a rather involved psychological study of the fact that no group of people can repeat the same story without changing it in one way or another. The Russian version of this familiar theme tells the story in such detail that a whole series of humorous situations is produced. Chatzky was a bold, progressive spirit; Molchalin a spineless, bootlicking creature. The two simply lived in different worlds. Chatzky was sincerely in love with Sofia; Molchalin thought it wise to pretend to be. At a certain ball Chatzky twitted Sofia

¹¹ *The Misfortune of Being Clever*, I, 5.

¹² *The Misfortune of Being Clever*, III, 7.

about her "knightly" lover. Whereupon simple, misguided Sofia, seeking revenge, whispered to one of the guests that Chatzky was mad. The rumor spread, each succeeding person eagerly seizing on it and embellishing it. Soon Sofia's half-hearted statement, clothed upon until it became quite unrecognizable, came to be the gospel truth. The result was partly a study of mob psychology with all its dramatic possibilities from the humorous point of view, and partly something more elusive. For the working out of the scenes is more elaborate than anything in the Russian drama of the previous age. The effect is not simply that of a howling mob crying in one voice, "He's crazy; down with him." There are genuine distinctions between the different characters. The granddaughter is impressed quite differently from Famusov, as she naturally would be in real life. The humor in the situations is more complex than anything we have seen before. Besides the main current consisting of easily intelligible exaggerations, there are more subtle streams as well, streams which have been used, by the way, as texts for all sorts of propaganda. We smile as each guest takes up the tale, but our amusement is not so secure as when we smile in superiority at Molchalin, weak fellow that he is. For here we are ridiculing the best people of their day, those to whom power and privilege were a heritage, the class that was cultured if there existed any culture in the Russia of that day. The process of condemnation in all its ramifications is exceedingly complex and the more we study the episode the more guardedly we must smile.

Griboyedov, then, treated his humorous situations rather fully, bringing out details and providing a background. He is less crude than Catherine, less obvious than Fonvizin, and his subjects are more profound than those of either of his predecessors. His humorous situations are equally as amusing as theirs, but more subtle and more civilized.

Not for two decades do we detect any conspicuous change in the way Russian dramatists handled the inevitable humorous situations. Then it was that the immortal Gogol, with his keen appreciation of wit, gave us a more elusive and

sparkling array. They were not so strained, they came more naturally, with less conscious effort than we have seen before, even in the one important comedy of Griboyedov.

For example, in the very beginning of Gogol's play *The Marriage*, we have Podkolesin, a bachelor and a gentleman, who has decided at the urgent entreaties of his friend to try to get married. He is so self-conscious and fearful of being funny that he becomes extremely funny. To Podkolesin his approaching marriage seemed the most important event imaginable and he was surprised when others did not share this feeling. For example, after his servant's visit to the tailor the master queried:

"And didn't he (the tailor) ask whether the master wanted to get married or not?"

"No, he didn't say anything," was the stolid reply.¹³

Instead of ridiculing Podkolesin Gogol simply turned the spotlight on this one vulnerable spot in his nature, his vanity, and made that quality seem pathetically funny to us.

A humorous situation arises when Kochkarev implores the lady whose hand he is pressing Podkolesin to seek, to do something which will extend happiness to this poor man. The lady, a person of uncertain age, innocently and with an air of great benevolence says:

I couldn't dare to think that I could contribute to his happiness. . . but anyway I'm willing.¹⁴

His last hope of escape gone, the bridegroom suddenly becomes desperate. He pleads that the wedding take place at once, and again the lady is quite willing. But when left alone Podkolesin returns to his usual doubts. He determines to flee from it all. Fearing to be discovered by the wedding guests, he leaps on the window-sill, shouts, "May God give his consent," jumps to the ground, and the last we hear of him are his words to a cab-driver, "To the Canal, beside the Semenovsky Bridge."¹⁵

Such a play might appropriately be called a good drama

¹³ *The Marriage*, I, 4.

¹⁴ *The Marriage*, II, 19.

¹⁵ *The Marriage*, II, 25.

of marriage and might be read without annotation by anyone who enjoys a laugh-provoking tale. Not by any means is this true of Gogol's more famous play, *The Revizor*, which is not only more typically and exclusively Russian but also more closely connected with the social problems of the day. To understand its full social significance we must remember that it was intended to be a satire on the corrupt officialdom of the time. It is intensely interesting and replete with proof that Gogol did his best to pack it full of the most humorous situations his imagination could conjure up.

In the first part of the drama we have an extravagant scene when Khlestakov, a penniless young clerk from the city, rescued from starvation by the mayor who believes him to be the revizor, becomes loquacious as he recounts his exploits in Petersburg, boasts of his literary attainments and his influence in high circles, and declares that he can strike terror to the great men of the capital.¹⁶ The humor of exaggeration is paramount. We are genuinely amused by the spectacle of big, important men shaking like leaves before a slip of a youth whom we know to be a full-blown wind-bag. Here also Gogol appeals to that side of the popular mind which enjoys the discomfiture on the stage of an official before whom in real life the populace must bow. Such ridicule, really a mild form of burning in effigy, satisfies the same desire to throw off restraint.

In the last scene of the comedy when word has been brought that the real revizor awaits the officials at the inn, we have a humorous situation which is effective largely because of its unexpectedness. It is the famous dumb scene, from which we quote the stage directions:

The mayor stands like a post in the center with arms outstretched and head bent backwards. At his right hand are his wife and daughter with a gesture of straining toward him; behind them is the postmaster changed into a question mark turned in the direction of the audience; after him the school supervisor, lost to himself in the same guileless manner; after him, at the very edge of the stage, three ladies, guests, leaning on each other, the same satirical expression on their faces aimed directly at the family of the mayor.

¹⁶ *The Revizor*, III, 6.

On the left side of the mayor: Zemlyanika (overseer of charitable institutions) with his head bent slightly to one side, as if he were listening to something; after him the judge with arms open wide, squatting almost to the floor and making a motion with his lips as if he wanted to whistle or say: "There you are, old grandmother, you sure have got George's day now."¹⁷ After him Korobkin (a retired official and an honored man in the city), turned toward the audience with a winking eye and with a caustic insinuation regarding the mayor: after him at the very edge Dobchinsky and Bobchinsky (two gentlemen whom Kropotkin has called the "town Gazette"), with their arms outstretched to one another. The other guests stand simply like posts. For almost a minute and a half the petrified group maintains this position. Then the curtain is dropped.¹⁸

The effect is telling at the same time that it is funny. At first the audience is perplexed; for an instant it does not see the point. . . . Gradually the fact begins to dawn that the real cause of the sudden silence is a long-delayed attack of conscience. Laughter bursts forth at the thought of such an unusual occurrence among the bureaucracy. This moment of hesitation in the coming of the climax only serves to make the humor more clear-cut and lasting when we finally comprehend the whole situation. Furthermore, such an unusual scene in a talking drama gained great effectiveness because of its entirely unheralded and unexpected position at the end of a comedy in which the characters were noted for their volubility.

Considered broadly, then, the humorous situations in the comedies of our period underwent a complete regeneration. Catherine's early scenes stand out boldly and sharply on a rough, rude stage, crudely effective in spite of their simplicity. To Fonvizin fell the lot of polishing off and re-

¹⁷ This is a very common expression referring in a sarcastic sense to some unpleasant surprise. In 1497 Tzar Ivan III named one day of the 11 or 12 days dedicated to St. George, *viz.*, November 26, as a day on which those peasants who wished could change their domicile. In 1597 Boris Godunov allowed the landowners, if they cared to, to compel the return of any peasant who had not been absent more than five years. However, the muzhik was still allowed to change his abode on St. George's Day. The Code of Alexis in 1648 cancelled even this privilege, and the peasant became a serf bound to the soil. But the annual recurrence of the day reminded the serfs of their lost right of migration.

¹⁸ *The Revizor*, V, 9.

organizing the material with regard to form. Griboyedov added new elements, so that his work is marked by versatility of treatment; while it was the privilege of Gogol to bring to these already effective humorous situations a certain wealth of detail and warmth of color which they had previously lacked. Thus it is that in his best play they have a depth of feeling, a range of ideas, and a sympathy of humor which bear only evolutionary resemblance to the efforts of the great empress whereby she hoped to inspire others to emulate her in writing for the newly founded Russian theatre.

CHAPTER V

HUMOROUS DIALOGUE

The humor of the dialogue is more apt to be successful than that of its parallel form, the lengthy joke. The climax, coming with less obvious effort, is likely to be more of a surprise. The audience does not know so well beforehand that it is going to be expected to laugh, and consequently it has less time to set in motion those forces of human obstinacy which would tend to resist the effect. It goes under the influence of wit with less of a struggle when the dialogue form is used, for the element of unexpectedness adds zest to the process. The effort is more likely to "come off" as it were, and nothing is more futile than a joke which does not come off.

While much of the humorous dialogue of Catherine is utterly crass, it is a fact that occasionally she did include snatches which do come off. She is especially successful with her female characters who are usually great chatterers. Take the scene where a young girl is being educated by a certain servant and her sister-in-law, Snokha. The dialogue is from the one-act comedy *Madam Vyestnikova* (Mrs. Talebearer) *with a Family*.

DAUGHTER: Well, my suitor comes, what shall I do then, Maria?

MARIA: He will enter and bow to you.

DAUGHTER: And I will bow to him on my feet.

SNOKHA: You are already on your feet! What do you mean?

MARIA: No, you bow to him simply, decorously.

DAUGHTER (*making a foolish bow*): Just like that?

MARIA: Yes, and when he comes up to you and asks for your hand. . . .

DAUGHTER: I know, I know. . . . I extend my hand to him and say: "Now, kiss it."

SNOKHA: By no means! You give him your hand if he keeps requesting it, not saying a word.

MARIA: Yes, make it appear to him a little as if you were giving your hand to him reluctantly.

DAUGHTER: And suppose I don't want to give him my hand. . . ?

MARIA: Then by all means don't show him what you are thinking.
 DAUGHTER: All right. I know about it now.¹

In this instance the humor lies in our mental projection of the difficulties which a simple, not over-bright girl would have in getting into the straight-jacket of the formalism of society. In others of Catherine's humorous dialogues we find hints of satire directed against this same careful observance of form. For example, in *O Time* Nepustov, desiring an audience with Madam Khanzhakhina, is told by the servant Mavra:

Believe me, please, what I am telling you. You can't see her. She is praying now and I myself wouldn't dare to go into her apartment.

And when Nepustov inquires if the entire time passes in prayer, Mavra replies:

No, our exercises vary; however, everything goes in order; sometimes we have the usual services, sometimes the reading of the mineychetiy,² and sometimes, leaving off the reading, our mistress is kind enough to preach to us about prayer, continence, and fasting.³

And yet this same devout mistress, according to Mavra:

Threw a prayer-book at me once so hard that I had to go to bed for a week, she cracked my head open: . . ."⁴

This fierce fanatic typified by Khanzhakhina is the object of Catherine's choicest satire. In portraying her she often made use of a dialogue between some sharp-eyed servant and another party, often a moralizer bearing the name of Mr. Righteous One, Mr. Goodfellow, or Mr. Justice, after the manner of *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

The dialogue of Fonvizin differs from that of Catherine not in essentials but in form, being not quite so loose and irregular. His representative of the ritualistic, avaricious type found in Catherine is Madam Prostakov of *The Minor*. She would do anything for a kopek and even education she regarded only as a means to greater wealth. Some of her

¹ *Madam Vyestnikova with a Family*, scene 2.

² A collection of the lives of the saints compiled by the metropolitan Makariy (1542-1564).

³ *O Time*, I, 1.

⁴ *O Time*, I, 1.

traits may be observed in the following three-cornered dialogue. Tsifirkin (Cipherer), the teacher of mathematics, has set Mitrofan a problem in dividing three hundred rubles which the boy has supposedly found in the road.

TSIFIRKIN: It came to a division. How much would your brother receive?

MITROFAN (*computing in a whisper*): One times three is three, one times zero is zero.

Then the mother, who has been unable to follow the intricacies of this involved problem, begins to become suspicious and demands sharply:

What's this about a division?

MITROFAN: You see, the idea is to divide the three hundred rubles that we found into three parts.

PROSTAKOV: He lies, my dear child! The money was found. Well, then, don't divide with anybody. Take it all for yourself! My dear little darling, Mitrofan, don't try to learn this absurd science.⁵

The humor of such a type, forerunner of the samodursha⁶ of Ostrovsky's *The Storm*, is of necessity heavy and unwieldy. In any dialogue in which Madam Prostakov, or any of her class, takes a prominent part there is lacking that light, airy fun of the imaginative romance. And no less is this true of practically all of the dialogue of Fonvizin, for through it all the humor is somewhat obscured by the many social questions therein raised.

The humorous dialogue in the comedy of the age following Catherine is not so successful in its relation to the plays as a whole as might be presumed from a scattered reading of fragments. There is too desperate an effort to tack on a moral. Even in the best comedy of this transition period, *Calumny*, by Kapnist (1798), the dialogue is deadened by moralistic speeches and the humor is of inferior quality. If the fables of Krylov are thought to be an exception to

⁵ *The Minor*, III, 7.

⁶ The samodur (fem. samodursha) was a hard, grasping type of merchant made famous by Ostrovsky, the greatest Russian dramatist of the nineteenth century. The so-called *Kingdom of Darkness* was a symbolic name for the merchant class in Russia.

the rule, a closer study will reveal the fact that this type of writing was after all but a natural development from the moralistic propensities that had prevailed before.

By the time of Griboyedov there was an effort to include more of the purely artistic and less of the sermonistic elements in the comedy. Humorous dialogue had, therefore, more opportunity to link itself closely with the plot as a whole. An effort was made, moreover, to prepare the audience before the dialogue was commenced. Thus in *The Misfortune of Being Clever* Natalia Dmitrievna does not introduce her husband to Chatzky abruptly. A pleasant little conversation of renewing old friendships precedes. We are prepared to see some angelic sort of male, pale and delicate, but when, instead, a veritable athlete is ushered in the shock is great and the laughter spontaneous. Says this Platon Mikhailich:

Hullo, Chatzky, old chap!

CHATZKY: My dear Platon, this is capital!

.

PLATON: When you get married, old chap, remember me! The boredom of it will make you whistle the same tune.

CHATZKY: The boredom! What? You're paying tribute to it already?

.

Go back to the regiment! They'll give you a squadron. What was your rank?

At this Natalia Dmitrievna, afraid of losing her darling, breaks in:

My Platon Mikhailich is in delicate health.

CHATZKY: Delicate health? How long's that been?

NATALIA: He's always got rheumatism and headaches. . . . Oh, my pet, you've flung open your coat and your waistcoat is unbuttoned. . . . Button yourself up quickly.

CHATZKY: Well, God have mercy on you! You've certainly altered in a short time. Wasn't it at the end of the year before last that I knew you in the regiment? No sooner was it daylight than your foot was in the stirrup, and you were off on your horse, whether the autumn wind was blowing in your face or at your back.

PLATON (*sighs*): Heigh-ho, old chap, life was glorious then.⁷

⁷ *The Misfortune of Being Clever*, III, 5.

In the dialogues between Chatzky and Famusov in the same comedy, there is a certain humor of a dry, intellectual sort, rather than of the pure, spontaneous brand. Humor there is unquestionably, however, for the spectacle is indeed amusing when two men carry on an extended and heated conversation, neither having the faintest idea of what the other is driving at and each horrified by the other's position. Such conversations are skillfully worked into the main thread of the plot of Griboyedov's masterpiece.⁸

In one of the earlier attempts of Gogol we are surprised to find a dialogue which might have been written in the days of Catherine and which is of value only as a basis of comparison with his more finished productions. The play itself is known as *Fragment*. An episode runs as follows: two characters are gossiping about a mutual acquaintance, one Nataliya Andreevna Gubomazova (of the rouged lips), Sobachkin says:

Do you know that she whips her children herself?

MARIYA: No, you don't say so! Oh, what a shame! Can it possibly be true?

SOBACHKIN: Here's the cross on it. Permit me to tell it to you. Once she ordered her naughty little girl to lie down, of course on a bed, but she herself went into another room, I don't know what for, for switches, I presume. Meanwhile, for some reason or other, the little girl left the room and in her place came the husband, he lay down and fell asleep. The mother of course reappeared, ordered another girl to sit on his legs, covered him with a sheet, and engraved her husband up in good shape.⁹

Such a dialogue, while crudely funny, does not fit into the scheme of the piece very well. The precise reason for its insertion is not very clear, partly no doubt because it is only a fragment, partly because the genius of Gogol had yet found the field in which it was fitted to come to fruition.

In *The Marriage* the dialogues are better, although the subject has not yet enough of the native element to give him full sway. In this play, for example, two suitors for the same lady meet at the home of the fair one.¹⁰ The

⁸ *The Misfortune of Being Clever*, II, 2.

⁹ *Fragment*, scene 2.

¹⁰ *The Marriage*, I, 15.

two carry on a verbal fencing match, amusing but certainly not unique nor original. This is typical of the dialogues in the entire play.

But Gogol is at his best in an atmosphere which is more truly Russian. Then and only then is his humorous dialogue peerless and inimitable.

Thus in the second act of *The Revizor* the mayor is in great fear lest the inspector expose his misdeeds, while Khlestakov, the poor clerk who is taken for a revizor, is in mortal fear lest he be arrested. They face each other in one of the most dramatic colloquies one can imagine:

THE MAYOR: I wish to offer my good wishes!

KHLESTAKOV (*bows*): My respects!

MAYOR: Pardon me.

KHLESTAKOV: That's nothing. . . .

MAYOR: It's my duty as the chief official of the town to take pains to see that no vexations to any newcomers and respectable . . .

KHLESTAKOV (*at first he stammers a little but at the end of his speech speaks loudly*): What can be done about it? . . . I'm not guilty. . . . Truly I'll pay. . . . They'll send it to me from the country. . . . He's more to blame: he gives me meat as hard as a board; and the soup — the devil knows what he put into it, I had to throw it out of the window; he starves me with hunger the whole day through. . . . The tea's so strange: it smells of fish, not tea. I ask you, what kind of person am I . . . that's all I have to say!

MAYOR (*becoming timid*): Forgive me, in truth I'm not to blame. On our market the meat is always good. The Kholmogorskiye merchants, sober people and good, bring it in; I really don't know where he gets such meat. But if it isn't right, then . . . Permit me to suggest to you to go with me to another inn.

KHLESTAKOV: No, I don't won't to! I know what another inn means: it means to prison. . . . Indeed, how do you have any right? Yes, how do you dare? . . . You see I . . . I serve in Petersburg. (*He gets bolder.*) I, I, I . . .

MAYOR (*aside*): Oh, my God, how angry he is! He has learned all, those cursed merchants told him all!

KHLESTAKOV (*more courageously*): If you come here with all your whole police force—I won't go. I'll take it direct to the minister! (*He pounds on the table with his fist.*) What's the matter? What's the matter with you?

MAYOR (*agitated and trembling with all his body*): Have mercy, don't ruin me! A wife and small children . . . Don't bring misfortune on a man!¹¹

¹¹ *The Revizor*, II, 8.

So the clever conflict is protracted from line to line. The mayor becomes more and more fearful at the same time that Khlestakov becomes bolder and bolder. It is clearly this development, this progressive humor that distinguishes the dialogue from all other media of humor we have considered.

Some of the best dialogue in *The Revizor* is that in which the female characters take part. The two women whom Gogol introduces are Anna, the wife of the mayor, and Marya, his daughter, both of them essentially social climbers of the harmless sort. Their intense interest in the revizor, his appearance, his age, and his manners, stands out in sharp contrast to the queries of the officials concerning his willingness to be bribed, or the rigidity of his interpretation of the word duty. Apparently the slick, urban manner of Khlestakov satisfied them, for both at once tried and indeed succeeded, or so they thought, in capturing him. The skill with which Gogol has Khlestakov lead on the two women at the same time adds a charming and thoroughly amusing touch to the play.

Towards the end of his stay Khlestakov inadvertently kissed Marya on the shoulder while she was looking out of the window. Then when she pretended to be offended, he quickly fell on his knees, protesting his repentance. At this melodramatic juncture the mother appeared and packed the daughter off. For an instant the lover arose . . . but no sooner was he left alone with the mother than he fell on his knees and announced:

Lady, as you see, I am burning up from love!

Whereat the mother replied,

Why are you on your knees? Oh, get up, get up! the floor here is not at all clean.

Undisturbed by such frigid realism the ardent lover continued:

No, on my knees, unfailingly on my knees, I want to know what the verdict is for me, life or death.

When the puzzled woman inquires whether it is herself or her daughter with whom he is in love, he cries:

No, I am in love with you. My life is on the brink. If you do not crown my steadfast love, then I am not worthy of this terrestrial existence. With passion in my breast I beseech your hand.

The woman again becomes realistic.

But be kind enough to see that I am in a certain condition. . . . I'm married.

Then in one of the most delicate touches in the play Khlestakov murmurs:

That is a trifle! For love there can be no separation; and Karamzin said: "The laws condemn."¹² We will depart to the shelter of the billows. . . . Your hand, I beg for your hand.¹³

Humorous dialogue in the hands of Gogol, then, was a subtle instrument which he knew how to employ with telling effect in his more mature plays. Always sparkling and vivacious in every situation, he was especially at home when dealing with the kind of humor which enabled him to cause two characters to play back and forth against one another, often unconscious of the mirth they were provoking. Accordingly he availed himself of that deep human trait, inherent in every one, which causes us to enjoy being let in on a joke that the rest are not allowed to know. In the two examples of humorous dialogue quoted from *The Revizor* none of the parties concerned sensed enough of the whole truth to see the point. Even Khlestakov, who knew more than the others, was on too thin ice to enjoy the dance. As a result, the reader, being skillfully made to feel that he himself is wise enough to see where others are blind, cherishes a kindly disposition toward the author who has made this compliment to his egotism possible. By this simple application of his knowledge of human nature, Gogol has succeeded in that most important of attempts for a dramatist in the realm of comedy, that of getting his audi-

¹² From a sentimental poem of Karamzin, the great representative of sentimentalism in Russia, entitled *The Island of Bonholm*. The first verse runs as follows: "The laws condemn the object of my love, but who, my heart, can oppose himself to thee?" Found in *Sochineniya*, Karamzin, Moskva, 1820, vol. VI, p. 184.

¹³ *The Revizor*, IV, 12 and 13.

ence on his side and in a pleasant frame of mind. Thus humorous dialogue has been made to do its share of the work of producing in final result a tremendously successful comedy.

In general it may be said that the humorous dialogues produced by the Russian comedy writers of prominence up to the period of Ostrovsky came to be increasingly effective. Commencing with the pioneer efforts of Catherine a conspicuous improvement could be noticed by the time of Gogol, when they were more closely related and more genuinely helpful to the unified progression of the plot as a whole. At length they became not so much extraneous insertions as polished vehicles of expression which were able really to carry along the action. Well-suited as they are by nature to depict sharp contrasts they, unlike puns and jokes, increased in value as the author paid more attention to the deeper demands of humorous art and less to those elements which are merely facetious. As a consequence, Gogol especially used them with marked success to bring out on the stage, to the intense amusement of his numberless audiences, those inimitable characterizations of the preposterous foibles of light-headed and ambitious women.

CHAPTER VI

HUMOROUS TYPES

Of all the types in the Russian comedy from Catherine to Gogol the one which probably comes the closest to those of the western comedy is the gallophile. Apparently in most of the modern world imitation of the culture of France has been attended by excesses which have given a pretext for strong reactions against the adoption of foreign manners and customs. There was even in England in the seventeenth century a strong feeling of resentment against gallomania, a feeling which found expression in Wycherly's *The Dancing Master*, among other works. While of course Molière in *Les Femmes Savantes* and *Les Précieuses Ridicules* showed that in France herself the most sensible people were opposed to ridiculous affectation.

In Russia in the later comedies of the period under consideration, those of Griboyedov and Gogol, the opposition to gallomania, although present to the very end, did not take shape in the form of one character as it did in the earlier works. Khlestakov in *The Revizor*, who suggested by his vaporous personality some of the qualities of the gallophile, was that and much more. Most of the guests at the ball and in fact the heroine herself of *The Misfortune of Being Clever* were likewise tainted by a yearning to imitate the external veneer of French manners, but there was no clear-cut representative of the type, one who could unmistakably be called a gallophile.

Quite the opposite is true of the first part of the period. For example, in *The Name-day of Madam Vorchalkina* of Catherine, the gallophile, Russianized and dressed in Russian clothes, is seen in Firlyufyushkov. This dandy displays a passion for gossiping of all kinds and when a recent comedy is under discussion he promptly disagrees with the

view that the play was treating of society in an impersonal manner. He says of the characters:

I know them all by name.¹

Another quality of Firlyufyushkov which he imitated from the French "gentleman" was that of the point of honor. For although he is lukewarm about paying his debts, he insists that nobody shall have the right to satirize him, on the stage.² He is a boaster and a coward.³

A better known and more highly developed type of gallophile is Ivanushka, hero of Fonvizin's *The Brigadier*. Compared with Firlyufyushkov he is less of a braggart and more of a man in spite of his youth. He displays, however, the same ennui toward life, in fact his first words in the very first scene of the play are:

Gela (hélas).

Ivanushka is quite a gentleman in his dealings with his future wife. He frankly admits that he considers her frightfully crude. He does not play with the feelings of any woman but the councillor's wife who, being herself a gallophile, thoroughly understands the situation. There is no attempt to take advantage of the simplicity of a young girl. His *affaire de coeur* is at least on the level.

On the other hand his love for foreign nonsense makes Ivanushka brutally disrespectful to his parents. With stinging contempt he says:

I am endiferan (indifférent) toward all that concerns my father and mother.⁴

These two, then, Firlyufyushkov and Ivanushka, are the only clear-cut examples of the gallophile found in the greater comedy of the period from Catherine to Gogol.

Another amusing type closely connected with the west is that of the so-called *savant*. In *The Name-day of Madam Vorchalkina* Nekopeykov affords an example of Catherine's

¹ *The Name-day of Madam Vorchalkina*, I, 7.

² Cf. *The Name-day of Madam Vorchalkina*, II, 1.

³ *The Name-day of Madam Vorchalkina*, IV, 7.

⁴ *The Brigadier*, I, 3.

use of this character. Nekopeykov is a poverty-stricken fellow possessed of a brain fertile with plans for money-making. Says he:

This paper, sir, is one on which the very greatest welfare of the empire depends. . . . I have thought so much of increasing the money of Russia . . . yes, and even the silver as well . . . to such a degree that every man who has need of any coins will have only the labor of picking them up from the street where they will be rolling around.⁵

Like Alceste in *Le Misanthrope* of Molière Nekopeykov attributes his lack of success in legal matters to his failure to make personal acquaintance of the judges:

In telling of a crony of his Stikhotkachev (Mr. Verseweaver) he says:

. . . What a brain! At any time on any occasion he will compose a thousand verses of any kind you wish. Although he praises me best of all, yet he gives justice to all in his verses; for example, a while ago he said about me that it was impossible to think of anybody more wise or thoughtful than I. What could be more just?⁶

Like his kind the world over Nekopeykov always made it his business to keep in the company of the well-to-do in order to be sure of not starving.

All in all Nekopeykov reminds one of the impractical and stilted Pancrace of Molière's *Le Mariage Forcé*. He is not an indigenous Russian personality. But Catherine undertook to russify this character and in so doing committed a glaring inconsistency. Flying in the face of the fact that the characteristics of Nekopeykov and his kind are those of the pedant of French literature, not those of the hard-headed Russian trader, she nevertheless tried to connect him with the ancient merchant class in Russia which believed in illiteracy. Thus she makes Nekopeykov declare his distaste for letters.⁷ But the fact is that he has nothing in common with the sharp, practical student in the great school of life which Beaumarchais has delineated in his Figaro. Neither does he belong to the circle of the travelling philosopher, that apostle of optimism, the celebrated Dr. Pangloss of

⁵ *The Name-day of Madam Vorchalkina*, I, 5.

⁶ *The Name-day of Madam Vorchalkina*, V, 11.

⁷ *The Name-day of Madam Vorchalkina*, I, 5.

Voltaire. On the contrary Nekopeykov is a pedant entirely out of touch with any sort of practical living. He certainly belongs to the class of those shallow professional wiseacres who frequented the salons of *les précieuses* and pretended to read every book that came out. Thus Catherine's attempt to make of him a Russian of the type which did not believe in learning, results only in distortion.

Fonvizin succeeded in greater measure than Catherine had done in taking this type and making it true to Russian life. This he did in the persons of the three tutors of Mitrofan in *The Minor*. These three tutors are introduced by Madam Prostakov as follows:

We pay money to three teachers: the deacon from Pokroy, Kuteykin, comes for grammar; and Tsifirkin, a retired sergeant, teaches arithmetic to him, my dear sir. They both come here from the city. The city, you know, is three versts from us. A German, Adam Adamych Vralman, teaches French and all the sciences.⁸

In connection with Vralman there is an even more penetrating brand of satire, for the Russian for the word German is *Nyemetz* meaning *the dumb one*. Thus when Fonvizin was casting around for a name for the dumbest of tutors he achieved the desired effect by calling him Vralman (the babbler) a German. This Vralman proves to be a former coachman of Starodum and utterly unfitted for his position.

There is this great difference between these representatives of so-called learned men of Fonvizin and the Nekopeykov of Catherine: the former really did not want to be teachers but believed that they must in order to make a living, like the drunken M. Beaupré in Pushkin's *The Captain's Daughter*; whereas Nekopeykov took the intellectual road because he thought it to be easier than working with his hands. Not one of them corresponds to the more lovable Karl Ivanovich in Tolstoy's *Childhood* and even he was not a Russian type. Yet in the larger analysis all of these so-called savants in the comedy of the time of Catherine are one in that they are all only half educated and in that they all have prototypes in western literature. They are not peculiarly Russian personalities.

⁸ *The Minor*, I, 6.

Quite in line with what would be expected in a period dominated so largely by the French influence the confidant and confidante making practically one type are found in varying forms throughout the whole cycle.

Nepustov in Catherine's comedy *O Time* is the living image of the old French confidant. His calling is as carefully worked out and regulated as if he had been a character in one of the classically correct dramas of Racine. Nepustov helps the play to observe the unities by going ahead and arranging all the details of the wedding for the real lover. Beyond this, however, he is a rather colorless personality, for since his friend does not waver in his desire to marry there is not the humor connected with him that there is with Kochkarev in Gogol's *The Marriage* where the lover constantly tries to give up the pursuit.

Mavra, on the contrary, the confidante of the heroine in this same play of Catherine, is of a more vivacious type. She actually influences the action of the comedy by her admonitions to her mistress concerning marriage.⁹ But Mavra is not chiefly a confidante but a pert maid and as such she will be considered in a later section.

Strangely enough, Fonvizin who imitated the French classicists in so many ways did not include in any of his more important plays a representative of the confidant type, the only character in any way similar to it being Menander in *Korion* who acts in the capacity of a friendly confidant to the hero.

The Marriage by Gogol, on the other hand, affords a good example of a confidante in the person of Arina Panteleymonovna, the aunt of the heroine. This good soul believes her niece will be happier if she marries one of her own class, a merchant, instead of angling for a dvoryanin (a gentleman in the most narrow and aristocratic sense). She says:

Oh, Agatha Tikhonovna, you wouldn't have spoken in this manner if your deceased father, Tikhon Panteleymonovich, had been alive. He used to come down on the table with his whole fist and shout: "I spit," he would say, "on him who is ashamed to be a merchant:

⁹ *O Time*, II, 1.

yes, and I won't give," said he, "my daughter to any colonel. Let others do it! And my son!" said he, "I will not send in to the civil service." "Why," said he, "doesn't a merchant serve the tzar as well as anybody else?"¹⁰

Clinging tenaciously to this one idea she tries, as far as she sees, to be a good confidante to her niece.

The counterpart of Arina Panteleymonovna in the same comedy is Kochkarev, the friend of the lover. He is clearly a confidant of the militant type, for instead of consulting Podkolesin's preference in the matter he decides arbitrarily on the woman whom his friend shall marry. Priding himself on his energy he stirs up the slothful lover with the words:

What are you living for? Now, look in the mirror . . . what do you see there? A stupid face . . . nothing more. But there, just imagine it, little children will surround you, not just two or three, but perhaps a whole sextet and all as much like you as one drop of water is like another.¹¹

These two then are the confidants of Gogol.

Speaking broadly, therefore, we found that in all the Russian comedies of our period except those of Fonvizin the confidant as a type has a place. In Catherine the type is identical with the French classical school; with Gogol it is somewhat bolder; but the changes during the period between these two authors were of a shallow nature rather than of a fundamental character.

The next type to be studied is the rogue, familiar enough in western literature, and developed with the greatest fullness in Spain. At his best the rogue was a picturesque fellow, lax in his morals but clever and, according to his code, a gentleman. The type in Russia was, however, degenerate, a weak imitation of a great and charming original.

In *The Name-day of Madam Vorchalkina* Catherine has twin representatives of the rogue type in Spesov and Herkulov. Spesov is a poor sort of noble adventurer of the kind to be found in the *Novelas Ejemplares* of Cervantes; while Herkulov is only a rougher henchman to do the dirty work. True soldiers of fortune, they are proud of their position, and do not consider themselves bound by the laws

¹⁰ *The Marriage*, I, 12; and II, 25.

¹¹ *The Marriage*, I, 11.

of common decency. They are always out of funds and absolutely unscrupulous. Being pressed for money the two form a dastardly plan for forcing Madam Vorchalkina to marry off her daughters to them at once. Then Herkulov says evenly:

Well, and if she won't believe this one, then we'll think up something else, we'll let drift abroad some other rumor, or we'll seek a means of obtaining our desire by deceit.¹²

Spesov, considering himself of high birth, had no use for people who were not in his own circle no matter how upright they were. Once he sneered at good old Dremov:

We neither at the present time nor in former days ever heard of the family of the Dremovs . . . my grandfather surely did not associate with your grandfather.¹³

As to Herkulov, it was he who pounded Firlyufyushkov so unmercifully with his cane in a crude scene which is distasteful to a modern reader.¹⁴

In *The Gamblers of Gogol*, a comedy made up entirely of rogues, Ikharev may be taken as the best specimen because he represents all the immoral trickery of the others with the added quality of elaborate self-justification. Speaking to his pack of cards he thus tries to prove that his underhandedness is only for the good of humanity:

But look at this, this is what you may call capital. Now I can leave an inheritance to my children! There she is, a pack of cards made to order . . . a real pearl . . . serve me, my dear, as your sister served me: win for me also 80,000 rubles and I will erect a marble monument to your memory when I get back home; I'll order it in Moscow.¹⁵

Although in general Ikharev is simply the conventionally callous rogue, Gogol has won praise for having him at the end unrepentant and confused in his moral values. This, it goes without saying, was a triumph of art over didacticism.

¹² *The Name-day of Madam Vorchalkina*, II, 2.

¹³ *The Name-day of Madam Vorchalkina*, II, 7.

¹⁴ *The Name-day of Madam Vorchalkina*, IV, 7.

¹⁵ *The Gamblers*, I, 2.

Finally, no sketch of the rogue in the Russian comedy would be complete without the consideration of Khlestakov, the master bluffer, in *The Revizor*. No doubt it would raise a storm of protest to say that he is not a true Russian in conception. Yet certainly the realistic school in Russia, in all their exhaustive efforts to find indigenous types, never unearthed a character just like him. If we are to grant that he is a Russian, it must be in the larger sense of a member of the empire, not of Great Russia. For Khlestakov resembles a Little Russian in temperament and make-up. Although surely he is at bottom the old Spanish picaroon, there is added to this fundamental character all the charm and color which a people capable of bearing so sensitive an artist as Taras Shevchenko¹⁶ might easily produce. Then too Gogol himself was especially well suited to work out such a character, for he wrote his masterpiece *Dead Souls* around Chichikov, a lovable scamp who had much in common with Khlestakov.

To begin with, Khlestakov is a dandy always, in spite of his poverty; besides being unable to eat coarse food he has the faculty of imagining some great good fortune which might befall him at any moment. How fine it would be to have them shout when he returned home:

. . . Ivan Alexandrovich Khlestakov from Petersburg, give word to receive him! ¹⁷

He lived in a world of fancy, so real that often, even in the midst of his boldest fabrications, one can scarcely believe that he is lying. Furthermore, he is always polite and charming, even open in his roguery, for when he makes his getaway he departs bidding good-bye to all with the greatest of good will. Says he:

¹⁶ Shevchenko (1814-1861), a writer of Little Russian birth. From Russian sources it is difficult to get an unbiased judgment of his work because Great Russians frown on him for his almost exclusive use of the Little Russian tongue; while his name is praised, probably excessively, by the group which desire to maintain an independent Ukrainia. Under these conditions his work as an artist is apt to be either overrated or underrated.

¹⁷ *The Revizor*, II, 5.

Good-bye, Anton Antonich! Much obliged for your hospitality. I realize this from the bottom of my heart: that nowhere have I had such a cordial reception. Good-bye, Anna Andreevna! Good-bye, my sweetheart, Marya Antonovna! ¹⁸

The type of the ingenuous heroine, common enough in the west, in Lessing's *Minna von Barnhelm* for example, is represented by Khristina in *The Name-day of Madam Vorchalkina*. Khristina, unlike her elder sister, believes that to love and to be loved is "the pinnacle of human happiness." ¹⁹ But she is not simply a girl of tender emotions, for on occasion she can act with energy and decision as when she boldly discloses the foul plans of Spesov and Herkulov. This is all the more surprising when one remembers that she was completely hemmed in by the strict customs of the time. At any rate she is far more interesting than her namesake, the heroine of Catherine's *O Time*, who tells her maid:

I shall marry him if he takes me. But if he does not take me, then I do not want to marry him. ²⁰

Marya, the recipient of Khlestakov's advances in *The Revizor*, is a still more vivacious and interesting type. In her first words she admonishes her foolish mother who cannot wait to see the revizor:

But what can we do about it, mother? It is all the same, in two hours we shall know all about it. ²¹

She is more balanced than her silly mother; she is sweet and attractive, and even fairly well-read, for in one instance she forces Khlestakov to admit that his boasted authorship of a certain book *Yury Miloslavsky* is questionable. ²² Marya is also no mollycoddle. She keeps up a spirited argument with her mother concerning which was the more favored by Khlestakov. ²³

Finally it must be observed that Marya played the diffi-

¹⁸ *The Revizor*, IV, 16.

¹⁹ *The Name-day of Madam Vorchalkina*, V, 1.

²⁰ *O Time*, II, 1.

²¹ *The Revizor*, I, 6.

²² *The Revizor*, I, 6.

²³ *The Revizor*, III, 8.

cult rôle which Khlestakov's lavished attentions forced upon her with great cleverness, and it was she who came nearer than anyone else to suspecting the genuineness of Khlestakov. Probably she was sincere in her angry outburst after Khlestakov had stealthily kissed her on the shoulder:

No, this is too much . . . such impertinence! . . . you treat me as you would some sort of girl from the backwoods. . . .²⁴

Flattered by his attentions though she was, Marya did not, for all that, really give herself up to the ardent Khlestakov without misgivings. All in all she was a decidedly attractive heroine worthy of a better fate than befell her.

The ingenuous heroine who had more influence than any other in the comedy of our period was Sofia of *The Misfortune of Being Clever*. Had she not rejected the attentions of Chatzky and rushed to the hollow embrace of Molchalin, there would not have been the exciting cause for the incurable melancholy and misanthropy of the former. And if, moreover, she could have realized in time the position of Chatzky he would probably have forgiven her and things would have been happier.

But Sofia could not understand this friend of her youth since he had returned from abroad.²⁵ The reason is patent when we learn that her ideal lover is one Molchalin of whom she says:

Molchalin is ever ready to forget himself for others, an enemy of insolence, he is always modest and unassuming.²⁶

That Sofia could tolerate such a deceiver proves in itself that she was a maiden of no discernment; yet when her father urges her to marry Colonel Skalozub she displays considerable independence of judgment and no little heat:

"How fine that would be," she cries, "I'd enjoy hearing all about fronts and ranks! He never spoke an intelligent word from his birth. It's all the same, marrying him or jumping into the river!"²⁷

²⁴ *The Revizor*, IV, 12.

²⁵ *The Misfortune of Being Clever*, I, 5.

²⁶ *The Misfortune of Being Clever*, I, 5.

²⁷ *The Misfortune of Being Clever*, I, 5.

Sofia's charm lies not in her judgment, however, but in her sentimentality of a melodramatic kind like that for which the heroines of Jane Austen (especially the two in *Love* and *Friendship*) were noted. Thus when Molchalin falls from his horse she promptly faints as one would expect a girl nourished on eighteenth century French romances to do. At the close of the drama when Molchalin has been shown up to her, Chatzky twits her bitterly with the words:

Hurry up now and faint! ²⁸

Even then when she has been thus scourged by Chatzky for her conduct, she answers his denunciation feebly, with a flood of tears and the distracted words:

Don't go on; I'm to blame all around! . . . but who would have thought that he [Molchalin] would have acted so cowardly!

We have then at least three attractive girls of the ingenuous heroine type in the Russian comedy from Catherine to Gogol: Khristina, a girl of spirit; Marya, young, attractive, and astute; and the Sofia of Griboyedov, a pure sentimentalist.

A specimen of the pert maid is to be found in the person of Mavra in Catherine's *O Time*. It is clear that she understands thoroughly the character of her hard old mistress and it is by her artless and penetrating satire that the hideous hypocrisy of Khanzhakhina is revealed to the audience.²⁹

But Mavra does not always show her cleverness simply by detecting the faults of her mistress, nor in dialogue with the callers at the house. Sometimes she stands aside and speculates on the larger values of life. Although her reasoning is not deep nor her conclusions infallible, yet her words often contain interesting bits of homely philosophy.

Like Mavra, Paraskovya, the maid in Catherine's *The Name-day of Madam Vorchalkina*, is given to soliloquizing about love in a cynical vein. She declares:

People in love are queer folks! You can hardly push them apart; once they are married you can't introduce them to one

²⁸ *The Misfortune of Being Clever*, IV, 12. ²⁹ *O Time*, I, 4.

another. At once they have separate carriages, and in three weeks after the wedding it will even have gotten to such a pass that they will be ashamed to eat together. . . .³⁰

Paraskovya had little faith in impractical and visionary people, being unable to comprehend the service they perform in compelling men to let their minds wander from the beaten track. In this respect she had much in common with Sancho Panza with his intensely practical outlook on life. Even when her really kind heart moved her to an act of kindness toward Nekopeykov she could not restrain her sharp and practical tongue from saying:

We can't be without a fool in this house.³¹

Thus the real and outstanding trait of Paraskovya was her pertness. She was sharp with everybody from her mistress to the servant Antip, and for everyone she had a ready answer.

Liza, in *The Misfortune of Being Clever*, is another representative of this same type, — the pert maid. She is distinguished by her boldness. Even to Famusov, her master, she says when he jollies her:

Leave off! . . . you're very flighty, that's what you are! . . . Be-think yourself, you old fellows. . . .³²

Liza also delivered a little soliloquy on love as Mavra and Paraskovya had done. And Molchalin, who tried to make love to her, she advised:

It is best that you do not indulge yourself, you who are looking for a bride: he is kindly and sweet who before the wedding does not eat and drink to satiety.³³

Like Paraskovya Liza is canny and practical. By admonition and precept she tries to avert the catastrophe which threatens her mistress; but her advice is of no avail. For unlike the real confidant of the Figaro type Liza is possessed of no authority and little intellect. She cannot,

³⁰ *The Name-day of Madam Vorchalkina*, V, 4.

³¹ *The Name-day of Madam Vorchalkina*, V, 11.

³² *The Misfortune of Being Clever*, I, 2.

³³ *The Misfortune of Being Clever*, IV, 12.

therefore, force her convictions, she must remain what she is, a pert maid.

The lovers in the Russian comedy of this time are weak representatives of that type. While part of their weakness is due to the lack of originality of the whole period, surely some of it can be attributed to the fact that Russian literature in general has not gone in for this kind of writing. The active, stalwart lover of Nordic lands or the warm, passionate lover of the Latin civilizations do not strike a responsive chord in Slavonic countries. To be sure the western Slavs do not come under this broad generalization so accurately as those who live to the eastward. The fact, for example, that the great poet of the Poles, Mickiewicz, in his *Pan Tadeusz* has some great love scenes proves nothing, for the Poles have always been under French influence strongly. Although Turgenev has strong love themes in his great novels, mainly, however, in connection with his heroines, he too spent much of his life in the west. In agreement also with this idea is the fact that love is more of an influence in those works of Tolstoy which approach western standards, such as *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenin*, and much less so in those which are more exclusively Russian, such as *The Cossacks*, *Sebastopol*, and *The Resurrection*. Whereas with the slavophile writers, Aksakov and the rest, with the more modern Chekhov and Garshin, Gorky and Andreyev, or finally with the greatest and most representative author Russia has yet produced, Dostoevsky, love as we understand romantic love is not the dominant note. This does not mean that in the opinion of the writer Russians do not love, but rather that the love-theme has never been developed and polished to the degree that it has in the literature of the west. So far Russia has no great love story.

If this be true it is little wonder that the writers of the Russian comedy of a century ago working largely on ideas borrowed from the west, considered the presence of lovers more as a part of their machinery to work with than as offering opportunities for the perfecting of their art. Especially is this true of the period of Catherine. Neither Molo-

kososov, Talarikin, Dobrolyubov, nor Milon, the four lovers in the four important comedies of Catherine's day, were anything but colorless lumps of flesh. They were lacking in ordinary life to say nothing of virility. Their love speeches are recited as if learned by rote,³⁴ the proposal scenes are mechanical and wooden. Dobrolyubov says to his sweetheart, for example:

. . . Also I cannot conceal my thoughts from you . . . my condition will be unhappy until that time when my greatest wish shall be fulfilled. You know in what it consists. My heart is known to you.³⁵

In a similarly dull and apathetic manner Milon reveals his pedantic personality when he says to the uncle of his sweetheart:

My dear sir! . . . No, I cannot conceal longer my sincere feelings . . . no. Your goodness attracts with its power every secret of my soul. If my heart is righteous, if it is worth being happy, on you depends its happiness. I make the proposition in this manner in order to have to wife your beloved niece.³⁶

One has the feeling that all of these four lovers, although they make pretensions, are not really in love but are forced to it by some intangible outside force.

The lover in Gogol's *The Marriage* is moved by an outside influence far from intangible, this influence being embodied in the person of his friend Kochkarev. Podkolesin then is the most unsatisfactory lover of all for he never even pretended to have a spark of feeling for any lady or for the institution of matrimony. His failure as a lover we must admit, however much we may condone his coolness.

The question is raised whether Chatzky, a most unsuccessful lover in actuality, for he lost his suit, was in spite of this failure, a successful lover from the artistic point of view. Probably those people who would approve of the Alceste of Molière would maintain the same position in

³⁴ *O Time*, I, 12.

³⁵ *The Brigadier*, IV, 1.

³⁶ *The Minor*, IV, 6.

regard to Chatzky, such is the similarity between the two characters.³⁷ Personally the writer, while admitting the great value of the comedy of character believes that it is unfavorable to the creation of this particular type. Just as in historical romances the lovers are rarely persons of prominence, so also when an author endows a character in a comedy with many elements of greatness, he thereby destroys the emotional elasticity which is a necessary part of a real lover. The emotional Sofia, therefore, was probably sincere when she declared that Chatzky with all his virtues was "not a human being but a serpent."³⁸

If Chatzky was so sincere that he had no time to be artistic, Khlestakov, the "lover" in *The Revizor*, was such an artistic lover that he did not feel the necessity for being sincere. At all events Khlestakov, endowed with the grace of a Don Juan, was a charming if insincere suitor, and even with this fundamental lack, comes closer to the ideal suitor than any of his predecessors in the Russian comedy.

The type represented by the blundering manservant is also found in the comedy of our period. There is Antip in *The Name-day of Madam Vorchalkina*, an awkward, good-natured fellow who is fond of speaking in proverbs and making crudely witty remarks. In speaking of his master he shows considerable penetration when he observes that his master's servants are more efficient than those of a certain neighbor because they are so well treated.³⁹

He is such a blunderer that no one takes him seriously and he sometimes overhears plots not meant for his ears. But, blundering to the end, he is too stupid to make use of what he has overheard, thereby losing the opportunity to exert an influence on the plot.

The ideas of Antip concerning marriage are unromantic to the point of sordidness. Thus when his master showed preference for the younger of the two sisters who already had two admirers, Antip in great disgust at such hairsplit-

³⁷ Cf. pp. 28 and 29.

³⁸ *The Misfortune of Being Clever*, I, 7.

³⁹ *The Name-day of Madam Vorchalkina*, I, 3.

ting advised him to take the one he could get more easily.⁴⁰

Antip then was a homely fellow, not over-bright, but with an intense feeling of loyalty toward his master. If he was coarse in his manner, yet he displayed at the same time a warm heart.

A blundering servant of even less intellect than Antip is Stepan, who does not appear after the seventh scene of the first act of Gogol's *The Marriage*. From his brief appearances we gain that he is chiefly stupid. Unlike Antip he offers no advice to his master nor has he any feeling of personal devotion to this master; he is content with carrying out the letter of his instructions incomprehensible though these may be. He is an underling in temperament as well as in position.

The blundering manservant who comes nearest to meeting specifications is Osip, the attendant of Khlestakov in *The Revizor*. His relative importance in the play is forecasted by his early delivery of a long and interesting soliloquy from the comfortable seclusion of his master's bed. He describes in terse but vivid popular language the colorful details of their journey of bluff and extravagance from Petersburg to the scene of the story and their hope for a good time the rest of the way to their destination.⁴¹ The only drawback in this sort of life, it seemed to Osip, was the fact that they were often in want of the barest necessities of life, food especially. For his master was wont to squander his substance on fine clothes and fancy food, leaving them often in a bad plight. He says:

And why? . . . because he doesn't occupy himself with his business: instead of doing his duty he goes chasing around the streets playing cards. . . . Oh, my God, even if it was only a bit of soup! You feel as if the whole world had been eaten up.

Until he is really filled up Osip constantly reveals the emphasis he places on food. Even his popular philosophy touches on this subject, for he says:

Oh, such a wretched life! On an empty belly everything seems heavy.⁴²

⁴⁰ *The Name-day of Madam Vorchalkina*, IV, 2.

⁴¹ *The Revizor*, II, 1.

⁴² *The Revizor*, III, 4.

But even if Osip did lose his buoyancy when he was hungry he was too canny a peasant to tell all he knew just because he had a good dinner. When the mayor's wife, having fed him sumptuously, queries:

Now then, tell me: do many counts and princes, as I suppose, go to see your master?

Osip replies:

(*Aside*) And what shall I say? If they have just fed me well, that means that in the future they will feed me still better. (*Aloud*) Yes, there come also counts.⁴³

Another of Osip's characteristics is his greed for gold, a quality which is evident when he even makes use of his master's "official" position to have a letter mailed for nothing.⁴⁴ This seems a little like the last straw, as does also Osip's request for hay to put under the mayor's best Persian robe which the audience knows will never see its rightful owner again.⁴⁴

In the Russian comedy from Catherine to Gogol there are some characters which might well come under the broad designation of clowns. Some of them are noisy fellows, some of them are always silent, but all of them are queer. The best example of the silent type is Molchalin with whom the heroine of *The Misfortune of Being Clever* falls violently in love. Although he is perhaps not a clown in the ordinary sense, some of his actions are certainly for no purpose other than to amuse. Witness his burlesque attempt to ride on horseback,⁴⁵ or the description of his love-making given by Sofia;⁴⁶ while not less grotesque is his mincing, fawning manner towards all those who he thinks have any influence. To Khlestova, the sister of his master's wife, he finds it good policy to say:

Your little pup . . . what an excellent spitz he is! He's not bigger than a thimble! I smoothed him all over: his hair is like silk!⁴⁷

⁴³ *The Revizor*, III, 10.

⁴⁴ *The Revizor*, IV, 9 and 16.

⁴⁵ *The Misfortune of Being Clever*, II, 7.

⁴⁶ *The Misfortune of Being Clever*, I, 5.

⁴⁷ *The Misfortune of Being Clever*, III, 12.

In contrast to the city-bred Molchalin, the next clown is Taras Skotinin, a country dullard and a clodhopper from Fonvizin's *The Minor*. He is a cowardly bully, abusive to his hirelings yet profoundly superstitious. Thus when Madam Prostakov is about to have the tailor punished on a special day, Skotinin remonstrates:

Who? What for? On the day of my betrothal! On account of such an event I beg of you, sister, to postpone the punishment till to-morrow; and . . .⁴⁸

Skotinin is unlettered and tremendously proud of it. When asked to read a letter he retorts:

I! I have never read from the day I was born, sister! God preserve me from such boredom.⁴⁹

His boorish manners and his delight in swine are illustrated by the fact that upon being introduced to a stranger he inquired:

I beg leave to ask, sir! I don't know your first and middle names, . . . in any of your hamlets do they raise pigs?⁵⁰

In the scene of his last appearance Skotinin reveals his clownishness when he gives as his reason for going back home:

Judge for yourself. People outreason me, but among pigs I myself am the most reasonable of all.⁵¹

Skotinin then is a gross caricature, so gross that he would possibly be considered more stupid than funny in our day. But in the days of Catherine, if we may judge from the success of the play in which he had no small part, he must have been well received.

Next to Skotinin the two town busybodies of Gogol's *The Revizor*, Bobchinsky and Dobchinsky, are the most farcical. What the author intended them to be is set forth in a Notice which he wrote telling how the drama should be played. In this he wrote:

⁴⁸ *The Minor*, I, 4.

⁴⁹ *The Minor*, I, 6.

⁵⁰ *The Minor*, I, 7.

⁵¹ *The Minor*, V, 4.

The two town babblers, Bobchinsky and Dobchinsky, should be acted especially well. The actor must delineate them to himself well. They are people whose whole life consists in running about the town with messages of respects (all together) and in the exchange of news. . . . They are full of curiosity from the desire to have something to tell about. Because of this Bobchinsky even hiccoughs a little from the desire to finish telling it all the quicker. They are both little short fellows, unusually like each other, both with small paunches. Both are round-faced and cleanly clothed with smooth hair. Dobchinsky even has a small bald place on the top of his head.⁵²

Clear as it is that Gogol never intended that they should be clowns, their nature is such that it has suited future actors and directors, always seeking to make the public laugh, to make them up in such a way that they are perfect buffoons. This tendency was evident very early in the history of the piece, for we have a despairing letter written by Gogol to a literary friend shortly after the first production, in which he said:

Both of my friends, Bobchinsky and Dobchinsky, came off wretchedly above my expectations. Although I thought that they would be wretched . . . I thought that their outward appearance and the position in which they are found would bring them out somehow or other and that they would not produce a caricature. Just the opposite took place: caricature was the exact result. Having seen them in costume before the production I already heaved a sigh.⁵³

The difficulty an actor playing either of these two parts would find in avoiding clownishness may be seen in the fourth act, when Khlestakov "borrows" from the company one after the other. After Bobchinsky and Dobchinsky have yielded up their tribute, a small sum each, the latter makes a request, as follows:

The matter is of some delicacy: my oldest son, you will be pleased to see, was born to me already before my marriage . . . that is, it is only said to be so, but it belongs to me as completely as it would be in marriage, and all this, as is fitting, I topped off by the lawful bonds of matrimony. And so I wish, be pleased to see, that he may now be entirely, that is, my legal son, and be called as I: Dobchinsky.

Shortly after this, Bobchinsky also makes a request:

⁵² Gogol, *Polnoye Sobraniye Sochineniy*, Slovo, 1921, vol. 6, pp. 242-3.

⁵³ Gogol, *op. cit.*, vol. 6, p. 135.

Most humbly I beseech you, when you go to Petersburg, say to all the different grantees there: the senators and the admirals, that so and so, your grace or your excellency, there lives in such and such a town a man by the name of Peter Ivanovich Bobchinsky.⁵⁴

How any playwright could include such lines as these in his work and then feel hurt because the actors descended into the realm of farce in trying to interpret them is one of the many enigmas connected with the life of Gogol.

The general type of boastful officer may be divided into two classes, of which the first includes those men who are concerned chiefly with the petty vanity of their calling; while the second includes those men who beneath all their bragadoccio really love the army and army life.

An example of this first class is seen in Colonel Skalozub in *The Misfortune of Being Clever*. At the same time that he is immensely proud of his profession, he is also entirely at home reciting the glories of military life to a group of ladies over the teacups. Skalozub, unlike Chatzky, is just fitted to live among the frivolous set of Moscow. With real sincerity he expresses himself as follows:

I am pleased at the skillful manner in which you touched on the prejudices of Moscow in favor of her best beloveds . . . the guards, the men of the guard, and those who guard, . . . they shine like the sun with their gold and brocade. . . .⁵⁵

The brigadier in Fonvizin's comedy of the same name is a representative of the second and more substantial type of boastful officer. Not a whit less bombastic than Skalozub, he is, however, rougher and more of a fighting soldier than the other. To the brigadier, the great, important thing in life is to preserve carefully all distinctions in rank and position. So deeply did he ponder this question that it is not deliberate irreverence, we feel, which prompts him to

⁵⁴ The Russian words are *siyatelstvo* and *prevoskuditelstvo* respectively. The former, a symbol of nobility, may be applied even to a second lieutenant; while the latter, a symbol of official rank, could be applied even to the son of a peasant, provided he later attained to high place in the public service.

⁵⁵ *The Misfortune of Being Clever*, II, 6.

retort heatedly, in answer to his wife's statement that all officers are the same in the eyes of the Lord:

Wife, I tell you what: don't butt in or I'll soon fix you so that there'll be nothing to count on your head. If you were better acquainted with God you'd know more, and you wouldn't babble such nonsense. How is it possible to imagine that God who knows everything is not familiar with our table of ranks? ⁵⁶ It's a disgraceful thing even to suggest such a thing.⁵⁷

Besides being rough to his wife the brigadier was abusive to his son. To this exasperating lad he cries out:

Now, aren't you a big blockhead? I called you a fool and you think that I'm flattering you: oh, what an ass! ⁵⁸

Even in his shameless love-making with the councillor's wife the brigadier cannot forget his high rank and great exploits. Having interrupted recital of the splendors of Paris by driving off his son, he proceeds to regale the lady with tales of how he "knocked the stuffing out of the Turks." ⁵⁹

And when the brigadier actually proposes to her, he does it in these characteristic words:

Imagine to yourself a fortress which a brave general desires to take, at that time he feels in the depths of his soul as I do now. I am the brave general, and you are the fortress which it is possible to breach no matter how powerful it is.⁶⁰

Thus we have clear-cut examples of the two classes of boastful officer, Skalozub who fusses over the minutiae of army life, its gold braid and fine uniforms; and the brigadier egotistic and uncouth, but passionately fond of actual army life.

⁵⁶ The table of ranks was a system started by Peter the Great, whereby each man in the service of the state whether soldier or clerk, had a right to a certain title, a certain uniform, and a certain scale of pay. It amounted to a militarization of the civil service.

⁵⁷ *The Brigadier*, I, 1. Also for an account of and an analysis of the relation of religion to the Slavic mind and temperament see: *The Light of Russia*, Donald Lowrie, Prague, 1923, pp. 33-36, and Chap. VII.

⁵⁸ *The Brigadier*, III, 1.

⁵⁹ *The Brigadier*, III, 4.

⁶⁰ Cf. Brandes, *Ludwig Holberg und seine Zeitgenossen*, 1885, p. 128.

There is in the comedies of the age of Catherine a certain type⁶⁰ which, though in itself far from humorous, sometimes appears funny because of its excessive stiffness and unnaturalness in the face of a humorous situation. This moralistic type gives a sort of humor by contrast and caricature.

Dremov in *The Name-day of Madam Vorchalkina* is certainly amusing when he tells in all seriousness how his family happened to receive its name:

My grandfather, having showed a desire to serve his fatherland, was rewarded by a patent of nobility: and when they came to the tzar to ask what they should give him for a title the tzar deigned to go off into a slumber . . . I am not to blame for that . . . and directed that they call him Dremov.⁶¹

This same Dremov often arouses from his meditation on the vanity of human life with a keen observation that is almost a proverb.

Pravdin in Fonvizin's *The Minor* is a man of much the same type. Moralizer though he is, he belongs to the class of doers as well as talkers for his mission is to bring order out of chaos, to replace unrighteousness with justice. His moralistic utterances are such platitudes, however, and are delivered with such profound seriousness that they are almost humorous.

But the most famous moralizer of the entire Russian comedy of our period has a prominent part in this same play of Fonvizin. He is called Starodum, his name, however, being in no sense synonymous with *starovyer* or old believer, a term applied to those who kept up old customs and superstitions. His name, rather, is meant to convey the impression that he believed in the virtues which had characterized the old Russia — truthfulness, integrity, and temperance. He was fond of young people, he wanted them to have a good time, but he believed it demoralizing to leave money to young people.⁶² He spoke frequently in parables and gave advice freely. Concerning marriage he counselled his niece:

⁶¹ *The Name-day of Madam Vorchalkina*, II, 7.

⁶² *The Minor*, III, 2.

Do not have love for your husband which would resemble friendship. Have for him friendship which would resemble love. That will be more durable. Then after twenty years of marriage you will find in your hearts the old attachment.⁶³

The sum of the philosophy of Starodum is contained in the one word *virtue*.

The corrupt official as a type was present in the comedy throughout the whole period from Catherine to Gogol. The theme was not indigenous but was imported from the west, from such sources as the judges in the lawsuit of Alceste in Molière's *Le Misanthrope* or Brid'oison in *Le Mariage de Figaro* of Beaumarchais. On the other hand, it reached a popularity and an importance in Russia which it had never begun to have on the stages of western Europe. There was a very definite and well-marked growth of the type from Fonvizin to Gogol. In this development Catherine had no part. It would certainly have been poor policy for her to emphasize in her comedies the corruption of her servants in official circles, for to have done this would have weakened the faith of the common people in their government.

Even Fonvizin, who in *The Brigadier* had a representative of this type, was careful to have the general background of his comedy one of respect for the central authority. This representative, the councillor, a clear-cut example of the corrupt official, was, furthermore, not in active service at the time of the play. In the words of his wife:

My husband went into retirement in the year when the regulation against extortioning came out. He saw that there was nothing in the department for him to do.⁶⁴

This little observation really turns the tables completely, for no matter what the councillor says later in the comedy about the righteousness of bribery, he can tell only ancient history. Because he has no present connection with the government his words are shorn of their danger. He is, nevertheless, an interesting type. Somehow without repenting for his sins in the slightest, he has taken on a strong

⁶³ *The Minor*, IV, 2.

⁶⁴ *The Brigadier*, I, 3.

feeling for religion. In reply to the statement of Ivanushka that in France they love, change their minds, marry, and separate without the oversight of the Creator the councillor says:

But that is in France and not with us true believers. No, dear son-in-law, both we and our wives are all in the hands of the Creator: with Him all the hairs of our head are numbered.⁶⁵

Yet this same man with evident satisfaction tells his idea of a court of justice in these words:

I was a judge once myself: the guilty one, so it happened, would pay for his guilt, and the righteous one for his righteousness, and so in my time everyone was satisfied, the judge, the plaintiff, and the defendant.⁶⁶

The councillor had one earnest conviction at least. Said he:

I have always said that it is impossible to suppress bribetaking. How can you be expected to decide a case for nothing, merely for your salary alone? From the day of our birth we have never heard of such a thing! The thing is against human nature. . . .⁶⁷

And of his faithful wife he declared:

A wife, no matter what she is, if she only has a righteous husband, will never take it into her head to fall in love with another.⁶⁸

The outstanding examples of the corrupt official are found in *The Revizor*. Since the chief, Anton Antonich, stands out from the satellites who cluster about him, a consideration of him will in a general way cover all the others. It is almost safe to say, in fact, that he is the best representative of this elusive and powerful personality in the whole Russian literature. In his *Instructions for those who would like to play The Revizor as it should be*, Gogol himself wrote:

This personage is most of all occupied with getting all he can from others. From this occupation he found time to look out on life in a stricter manner or to observe better his own self. From this occupation he grew vexed and oppressive and harsh without himself knowing

⁶⁵ *The Brigadier*, I, 1.

⁶⁷ *The Brigadier*, III, 6.

⁶⁶ *The Brigadier*, II, 1.

⁶⁸ *The Brigadier*, IV, 7.

it because he was not accustomed to subdue an evil desire; he has only the passion to gather in all that his eyes can see. He simply forgot that this would be a burden to someone else and that from this some other back must be broken. He suddenly forgave the merchants who had plotted his ruin when they made an alluring proposal, because these attractive blessings of life besotted him and made him grow hard and insensible to the suffering of others. He is conscious of the fact that he is sinful; he even goes to church; he even thinks that he is rigid in his belief. He goes so far as to consider repenting sometime or other. But the great weakness of his life is that he takes bribes and his great consuming passion is to take all he can and not let go of anything.⁶⁹

Like all others who live with a guilty conscience, Anton Antonich suffers acute anguish when he thinks he is to be found out, and he strides about madly crying "Shame! Disgrace! ", and other expressions of terror.⁷⁰

Anton Antonich is also religious, outwardly at least, and somewhat of a moralizer. He is so temperamental that in a moment he can change from bitter melancholy to the very pinnacle of gaiety. His vanity knows no bounds. With the same easy conception of his official obligations as the councillor of Fonvizin, he decides a case more in accordance with his mood than with justice. All these characteristics are hinted at when he says to the warden that he should announce to the people:

Formerly I fed you up to a moustache, but now I am going to nourish you into a full beard. Tell them all that, whoever comes with a request . . . Cry it abroad to the whole nation, peal it forth with a bell, the devil take it. When there is a celebration let it be a celebration.⁷¹

But these sporting qualities in Anton Antonich do not obscure the fact that he was an extortioner just the same. It is very evident that he made everyone pay well for anything he gave them.⁷² His avarice knew no bounds.

The only remaining humorous type in the Russian comedy from Catherine to Gogol which is worthy of attention is

⁶⁹ Gogol, *Polnoye Sobraniye Sochineniy*, Slovo, 1921, pp. 237-238.

⁷⁰ *The Revizor*, I, 3.

⁷¹ *The Revizor*, V, 1.

⁷² See *The Revizor*, V, 10.

that of the hard, grasping old woman, or samodursha, as she came later to be called. This type comes far closer than any of the previous ones to being a truly indigenous creation, although even here there is perhaps the hint of a slight connection with the mother-in-law of the western comedies. Such a parallel would be difficult to trace, however, and is for all practical purposes non-existent. That the samodursha comes so close to the spirit of life in Russia as to be thought of native origin, is proved by the fact that Ostrovsky, the great Russian playwright of the mid-nineteenth century, who went back to folklore and native customs for his inspiration, saw fit to make this type predominant in a whole group of plays of which the most renowned is *The Storm*. From this angle the period under consideration, excessively imitative in so many particulars, actually did succeed in what to all intents and purposes amounts to the creation of a character which was destined after the passage of years to take a high place in native literature.

Both of the more important comedies of Catherine contain personifications of this unpleasant class of woman. In *O Time* there are three old ladies who are of this type, Vvestnikova, Chudikhina, and Khanzhakhina herself. Since this latter dame is the most fully developed it will simplify matters to consider her as representing the others. Her own words will make clear her character. When she is busy with her prayers, there chances to enter her chamber a lad who wishes to marry. He asks her permission. Her own account of her reception of him follows:

I called to him: "Get out, don't confuse me in praying, you accursed one." But he fell at my feet; and a second time I said to him: "You devil, get out." But he, not saying a word, thrust a paper into my hand and went away. . . . And he thought of getting married! O unthinkable and diabolical suggestion! . . . He dared to ask my permission to marry! . . . However I ordered him to be whipped and to take his marriage on his back: next time let him forget to prevent me from making my prostrations! ⁷³

The Madam Vorchalkina of Catherine, though not so formalistic as Khanzhakhina, is quite as avaricious. From

⁷³ *O Time*, I, 2.

the general context it is fairly clear that her basic reason for not wanting to marry off her daughters was her desire to postpone as long as possible the paying of the dowry. Then too she was jealous of the good fortune of others, a fact which is made plain by her disgust at the charity shown by the state to foundlings.⁷⁴ More than this she is the very acme of conservatism. Her excuse for refusing to marry her younger daughter before her older is this:

I myself was the fifth daughter of my mother, and I was compelled to wait until all of my older sisters were married; what can you do about it! Orderliness and seniority demand it.⁷⁵

Madam Vorchalkina is not brilliant, for no one with half a mind would have given credence to Herkulov and Spesov when they declared that the government was going to issue an order that no marriages could take place for a period of ten years.

A more pleasant side of both Khanzhakhina and Vorchalkina is revealed at the end of the play when, overcoming their avarice for a moment, they give really large dowries to the girls. The impression persists that these old women might have had large hearts beneath their cold and inhospitable exteriors if they had not been so densely ignorant.

Fonvizin presents a still more uninviting woman in the wife of the brigadier, or in Russian the brigadirsha. In her, avarice is developed to the *n*th degree. She thinks of nothing else than money, even making her love for her son secondary. She is educating this son, Ivanushka, not for cultural reasons, far from it, but to enable him to get ahead in the race for money. Education for its own sake is abhorrent to her. She says:

Certainly grammar is not useful. Before you begin to learn it you must buy it. You pay eighty kopeks for it and whether you learn or not God knows.⁷⁶

The brigadirsha, like Khanzhakhina, is devoted to the forms of religion. If she is not so extreme as the other nor quite so violent a hypocrite, she is none the less too

⁷⁴ *The Name-day of Madam Vorchalkina*, II, 7.

⁷⁵ *The Name-day of Madam Vorchalkina*, II, 6. ⁷⁶ *The Brigadier*, I, 1.

anxious to appear religious. Her protestations of faith were too violent and accorded too little with her life practice to be genuine.

That the romantic element is entirely lacking in the nature of the brigadirsha is shown when the councillor, with the intention of making love to her, says:

May I request . . .

She interrupts him quickly with the words:

And what do you want to request of me? If only, my dear sir, it is not money then I can advance you something; you know how money is to-day, nobody loans it for nothing, and for the sake of it they don't stop at anything.⁷⁷

Madam Prostakov in *The Minor* of Fonvizin is made of the same material, except that she is even more than the brigadirsha bound up in her foolish son. In spite of her stinginess she hires three tutors for him and then enjoys telling how much they cost her, although she pays them only the merest pittance. She reckons learning on a dollars-and-cents basis and is, therefore, always on the anxious seat for fear she is not getting her money's worth from the teachers.

Madam Prostakov is also rough in a physical sense as is seen in her hairpulling struggle with her brother. She is cruel and exacting with her servants, but she is utterly lacking in courage when at the end she is punished for her sins.

Thus the two outstanding traits of this type are, avarice on a basis of excessive and unreasoning conservatism, and superstition. Around these two poles cluster all the emotions of their lives.

To sum up the general characteristics which marked the humorous types of the Russian comedy from Catherine to Gogol, mention should first be made of the gallophile as being more clearly than any other a borrowing from the west. He is found rather obviously in the early comedies of the period especially in Fonvizin; Gogol and Griboyedov,

⁷⁷ *The Brigadier*, II, 3.

on the other hand, used the general theme as an under-current without representing it in one outstanding character.

The so-called savant is best represented by the Nekopeykov of Catherine. Although he too is based on western conceptions, he finds his prototype not in the keen practicality of a Figaro nor in the optimistic philosophy of a Dr. Pangloss, but in the pedantic book learning of a Pancrace.

The confidant is seen in the person of Nepustov. He is one of the least interesting characters, for, as in the French models, although he arranges everything for his friend he is otherwise a rather colorless individual.

The rogue, coming from the original Spanish pica- roon through the medium of the various western literatures, is to be found even in the work of Catherine. Here he is simply a high class rascal far removed from the gracious sinner of the Spanish original. The only rogue in the whole comedy of the period with a vestige of the charm of the Spanish is Khlestakov, the master bluffer in *The Revizor*.

The type of ingenuous heroine also came from the west. The best example of this type is found in Sofia, heroine of *The Misfortune of Being Clever*. Utterly unsophisticated as she is, Sofia is fitted to live in no age but an age of sentimentalism.

The character of the pert maid is quite well developed. She is seen in at least two clear-cut examples, Paraskovya and Liza. Her outstanding characteristic is her pertness; but in addition she is a sensible person, warm-hearted and full of good advice. Her depth of intellect, however, is not great.

The lover is not a strong type in this period. With the exception of Khlestakov, who can hardly be called a lover because he lacked sincerity, there is not one satisfactory representative of this type in the entire comedy we have considered.

The blundering manservant is best seen in the person of Osip in *The Revizor*. He, like Antip, is a creature of no great intelligence but canny in true peasant fashion and

really devoted to his master however much he may criticise him. He is awkward and heavy and fond of the pleasures of the flesh.

Two dissimilar examples of the boastful officer stand out clearly. Colonel Skalozub is the type of boastful officer who enjoys dressing up in a fine uniform and regaling the ladies with tales of his exploits. The brigadier on the other hand takes greater delight in the discipline and hardships of actual military life. So saturated is he with the idea of the importance of rank in the army that he even speculates about rank after death. He is a rougher, cruder type than Colonel Skalozub.

Of the moralizers Dremov, in spite of his contradictory name, is accustomed to recite platitudes in no sleepy fashion. Pravdin, a similar figure, administers the duties of his office in so upright a manner that his moralizing is actually carried into effect. Starodum, theorizer that he is, occasionally illustrates his point in a virile way. He more than the rest was a real child of the author, as Poor Richard was of Franklin. The human side of Starodum is evinced by his interest in children and young people.

Although the corrupt official as a type was not an indigenous growth in Russia, it reached a higher degree of development there than in the west. For obvious reasons Catherine did not have a representative; Fonvizin created the councillor, a rather despicable person who was forced to retire because of his evil deeds; but it is Anton Antonich in *The Revizor* who stands at the head of the list. Extremely impulsive, he could be arrogant at one time and conscience-stricken at another. His outstanding trait, however, is avarice.

The type of hard, grasping old woman is practically indigenous. The representatives from the comedy of Catherine are avaricious, formalistic, and conservative. Knowledge appears to be their greatest need, a need, however, which they themselves would be the first to deny. The brigadirsha hates culture in any form, her one grace being her love for her son. She too is ruled by pride and avarice, as indeed are all the other members of this important group.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Since the first task which confronts one who would study the humor in the comedies of the period from Catherine to Gogol is of necessity that of limiting his study within reasonable bounds, we have judged it wise to pass over with a mere cursory glance the host of comedies produced during the period by the minor playwrights such as Sumarokov, Lukin, and Kapnist, and to investigate intensively only those comedies which in the judgment of posterity have been a faithful interpretation of Russian humor. This method has led to the analysis of the chief comedies of Fonvizin, Griboyedov, and Gogol, and to a lesser degree those of the Empress Catherine. The comedies of Catherine are worth little artistically in themselves. They have been included in our study, however, rather because they were of value in inspiring other and greater artists to pursue the art of comedy-writing. From the purely humorous point of view, moreover, these comedies are not to be disregarded.

One of the most interesting ramifications into which this study leads one is the consideration of those western influences which have left their mark upon the comedy of this period. Though fearing the charge of irrelevancy, we have included a short chapter on western influences. The French influence, with the tradition of Molière dominant, is seen in every author from Catherine to Gogol. In Fonvizin the French authors, inferior ones many of them, were appropriated almost bodily; while in Griboyedov is felt rather than seen the subtle influence of Sheridan, Shakespere, and Molière. For the Russian spirit was gradually breaking through the veneer of foreign affectation, and with *The Revizor* of Gogol we find a real Russian tradition in the drama. In the realm of comedy, then, this period did lay the foundation for the splendid edifice of modern Russian literature.

The consideration of humor proper as found in the comedies of Catherine, Fonvizin, Griboyedov, and Gogol, we have approached from two different angles, the first impersonal, the second personal. From the former angle the material was divided into three groups according to the particular form of humor, whether presented in the guise of jokes, or that of humorous situations, or finally, that of humorous dialogue. From the latter, the personal angle, the various humorous types were studied.

Of all the guises in which the playwright clothes the humor in his comedy, probably the lowest and least effective is the joke. Since, therefore, in the stretch of time under consideration, we find jokes interpolated with decreasing frequency, one indication is at hand to show that the humor in the Russian comedy was steadily advancing toward a more artistic plane. As to humorous situations, the rough scenes of Catherine, the more perfectly formed if not more original episodes of Fonvizin, the more varied technique of Griboyedov, and finally the more exclusively Russian effects of Gogol, warmed and colored as they were by the Little Russian influence, — all these go to prove that the successive dramatists were becoming more familiar with the machinery of their craft as well as with the Russian psychology. As the period wore along, as jokes were discarded, and as the humorous situation developed, the more complex mechanism of the dialogue came to be brought to bear with greater skill than formerly, for the possibilities in the way of depicting clashing interests afforded by this type of expression came to be realized more and more. This more involved form of humor, then, which the later artists employed increasingly to replace the joke, marks a step in the development of the Russian comedy. And thus it happened that the rarity of jokes in Gogol, his sympathetic appreciation of the value of the humorous situation, and the expanded employment of a more perfectly formed humorous dialogue, all tended to prove that there had been a definite evolution in humor through an impersonal medium, hand in hand with that improvement in every line which is characteristic of genuine literary evolution.

The personal method of approach to the available material involved a study of the humorous types found in the comedies from Catherine to Gogol. In considering these it seemed advisable for the sake of convenience to divide the main characters of the more important comedies of the period into thirteen classes. Of these the first eleven, including the gallophile, the so-called savant, the confidant, the rogue, the ingenuous heroine, the pert maid, the lover, the blundering manservant, the clown, the moralizer, and the boastful officer, all these are to a greater or less degree borrowings from the west. This does not mean that they are all of them inferior to the same types as they appear in the western drama. Some of them, for example the blundering manservant in *The Revizor*, are works of art, equal to the best that the theatre of the west had to offer at that time. At all events, when one remembers that so much of this work had to be explored to discover what the field had to offer before intensely original dramas could be produced, the unbiased critic will appreciate the efforts of the Russian dramatists to enrich their work with ideas from abroad. And certainly the twelfth type, the corrupt official, although borrowed in a crude state from abroad, attained to a perfection of development with Gogol which was unparalleled. The fact, however, that twelve out of thirteen types can easily be recognized in the western literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, proves that the commonly prevalent opinion that the period was predominantly imitative cannot be disputed, even after the most sympathetic study of the comedies themselves.

Though it must be admitted that the whole basis of humor in the comedy was imitative, with now and then an improvement over the originals, the fact remains, nevertheless, that the last type is to all intents and purposes original and indigenous. The hard, grasping old woman of the time of Catherine is surely of native growth and origin. Brought to some degree of perfection in the period under consideration, the subject was in readiness for the magic touch of a greater than any of the dramatists embraced in this study, for Ostrovsky, the greatest playwright Russia has yet produced. The consummation was the bitter irony

of the samodursha. Thus it is clear that if the Russian comedy from Catherine to Gogol had cherished only this one character its existence would have been justified. As a matter of fact it did far more, for in adapting as well as adopting some of the best of western types, it paved the way for a better day for Russian humor.

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VITA

This is to certify that I, Arthur Prudden Coleman, son of Carrie Davis and Michael Lyon Coleman, was born on Wildcat, Seymour, Connecticut, July 19, 1897. I received my elementary education in the public schools of Oxford, Seymour, and Southington, all of Connecticut. In September, 1912, I entered the Cheshire School, Cheshire, Connecticut, and was graduated therefrom in June, 1914. In September, 1915, I matriculated at Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut, and completed the academic course in June, 1920, with honors in general scholarship and special honors in Romance Languages. From April 6 to December 21, 1918, I served as a second-class seaman in the United States Naval Reserve Force. In the academic year 1920-21 I studied modern languages at Yale University. In 1921-22 I was a University Scholar in Slavonic languages in Columbia University, from which institution I received the degree of Master of Arts in 1922. I was again a University Scholar in Columbia in 1922-23. The year 1923-24 was spent in Europe as a Czechoslovak Government Scholar in the Slavonic languages and literatures at the Charles University in Prague.

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